

PROCLAMATION OF CORE VALUES: DEVELOPING A CHURCH PROFILE
USING CORE VALUES IN THE UNITED METHODIST
PASTORAL APPOINTMENT PROCESS

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

ABSTRACT

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In this descriptive project Evangel Heights United Methodist Church, South Bend, Indiana, staff-parish relations committee develops a church profile statement based on congregationally-identified core values to use in United Methodist appointment-making. This qualitative study, blending grounded and value theories, utilizes a preaching series, focus groups, and a questionnaire to elicit congregational reflection on biblical, historical, and theological core values. Although the full impact of the core value statement will be unknown until the next pastoral appointment, this process transformed the staff-parish committee members understanding of their work. The core value statement undergirds future interactions with the district superintendent and future pastors. The process can be replicated by other churches.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Nancy, my wife, whose encouragement, inspiration, and patience allowed me to persist in this project; to the members and staff of Evangel Heights United Methodist Church, South Bend, Indiana, who demonstrated keen ability to wrestle with core values and gave the gift of prayer, time, and understanding in order for this project to be completed; to the contextual team—Jill (facilitator), Kent (transcriber), Don (historian), Herman (statistician), and Joanne (editor)—whose God-equipped skills responded to every need in this study; to the instructors at the Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California—Dr. Lawrence Wilkes, Dean, and Dr. Sandra Herron—who provided life-changing coaching; to consults—Dr. Jackie Baston, Dr. Ken Modesit, and Mentor Dr. Dennis Miller—whose insights shaped the methodology and outcome of this project; and to the staff, members, and contextual team of The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, who laid the foundation for this project.

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Dedication

In memory of my parents

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States pastors and congregations wrestle with decisions about pastoral leadership. When a pastor retires, moves, receives another call, or must be replaced, a call committee within a congregational-styled church or a staff-parish committee¹ within a United Methodist Church must guide the church to a decision about their next pastor. In the congregational-styled church selecting a new pastor could take as long as several years, with interim pastors filling the leadership while the call committee surveys the congregation to identify church needs before opening the interview process. After the field of prospects narrows and invitations go out to top candidates to preach before the congregation, the congregation votes and ultimately calls the one deemed most appropriate for the position. This scenario plays out thousands of times every year but not within the United Methodist Church, where the determination for pastoral leadership profoundly differs. Instead of the local church determining its own leadership, most of the decision-making process takes place far away by a *bishop* and team of *district superintendents*, who introduce the new pastor initially to a staff-parish committee, preliminary to formalizing the *appointment*.

¹ Many United Methodist Churches refer to this committee as the pastor-parish relations committee, but the churches this pastor has served prefer that staff-parish committee be used, reflecting the responsibility of this committee to oversee and evaluate multiple staff members. For this reason staff-parish committee is used throughout this research.

Because this researcher has interviewed with and worked in both styles of churches, there is familiarity with the procedures and problems associated with both styles. Increasingly, in the United Methodist Church and in other churches, membership and clergy come from varied backgrounds. United Methodists over the years question, “Why don’t we hear them preach before they become our pastor?” “You mean we don’t interview several candidates before selecting one?” “Don’t I have any input in the decision?” “How do we know we have the right pastor for the church?” These are the usual questions staff-parish committees entertain from the congregation during pastoral changes within the United Methodist Church because they do not understand *itineracy*,² the movement of a pastor from church to church by the bishop of the *conference*. Itineracy has been the norm of the Methodist movement from its infancy. For decades, however, demand for changing the process has crescendoed within the denomination from the highest levels, including the Council of Bishops, to the person in the pew. Slowly the denomination has plodded toward more lay participation in the appointment of a pastor as cries for change have become more and more vociferous.

As inevitable changes take place within the United Methodist Church structure, the staff-parish committee must become equipped to engage more actively in the appointment process, especially in understanding the core values of the church and applying these understandings to a document called the *church profile*, a document that helps the district superintendent match pastor with church. As this research is compiled, impending mergers between the Detroit and West Michigan Conferences, as well as the North and South Indiana Conferences, signal potential systemic changes on the horizon

² The variant spelling of this word, used by the United Methodist Church in the *Book of Discipline*, appears here.

that may trickle down to the district level and increase the responsibilities of the already overworked *district superintendents*. Future changes may impact the staff-parish committee's role in appointment-making. Although no clear indication of and direction for change currently appear, district superintendents and bishops interviewed for this study believe that an informed, articulate staff-parish committee that understands the core values of the church at large and the local church will become increasingly vital to assure a positive future.

An Introduction to Core Values

Core values may have various meanings. Very simply, they are the building blocks of our individual or corporate identity. Core values answer questions such as, "Who are we?" and "Why do we do the things we do?" Core values play a role in marketing, psychology, sociology, anthropology, professional ethics, and corporate life, to name a few venues. But core values lie at the heart of an ancient study, theology, and the development of the community of faith. Thus a theological definition of values might be how we value God's identity and being and the work of God's people through the church.

Exodus illustrates an eternal God relating to a finite people, imprinting core values of covenant, law, and love into the hearts and minds of the early Hebrew community through the Passover and wilderness experiences. God utilizes a source of core value development in this passage: "When your *children* ask you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God had commanded you?' Tell them: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt

with a mighty hand”³ The writer of Exodus suggests that we learn values from childhood. From life-changing religious experience to matters of taste, we live according to our value system. But we certainly do not always agree with each other about what we value.

As a simple illustration, if an individual valued chocolate, he or she could conceivably favor driving many miles on a day off to visit a chocolate factory over spending that same day at a ball game; could choose a piece of chocolate cake over crème brûlée; and make chocolate the object of shopping or personal incentive and award instead of lazing away in a hammock on a summer’s day. Already value judgments are evident: “I would rather go to a ball game,” or, “That hammock sounds pretty inviting right about now.” What we value flavors our decision making process, defines our actions, and shapes our identity. Values play out near the boiling point in the church setting when it comes to preaching and worship style; mission and evangelism work; Sunday school activities for children, youth, or adults; pastoral care; prayer ministries; or selection of a pastor.

Because what we value is based on our preferences, our tastes, and our beliefs, a value, though not always publicly stated, is always deeply felt, or else it would not be a core value. Thus this research forges into territories fraught with passionate feelings. We plunge headlong into deeply held aspects of personal and church life that center on right, wrong, ought, or should about matters. And that sense of right or should comes from parents or peers, faith experience or Scripture, and community or conscience. A value is rarely shaken, except on the occasion of a life-changing event that throws that value into

³ Deuteronomy 6:20-21. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

question. For example if a youth grows up with parents who smoke and picks up the habit, but early in life one of the parents dies of lung cancer, the value attached to smoking may suddenly be questioned.

To explore core values, one should reflect on what is unshakable for the individual and the church, where and how those core values began, and the core experiences that frame one's own belief system. Certain values may persist from childhood. Certain life events may transform one's value system. Each person's and church's life story contains valuable clues to the discovery of core values. This research is about the discovery of core value identity, its impact upon the staff-parish committee, and its implications for the appointment-making process within the United Methodist Church. It may sound a simple task to write a core value statement for the church profile, but careful thought, planning, and prayer must accompany this process of discovery.

Invitation to Core Value Discovery

This process begins in chapter 1 as the stories of one pastor and church serve to illustrate the variant problems related to the United Methodist pastoral appointment-making system, either lack of articulated core values, or the promotion of core values that undercut the missional purposes of the church.

In chapter 2 the state of the art in church core values and resources available to the local church and pastor will be explored along with how core values impact church leadership and pastoral selection and how churches can identify and live out their core values. Essential to this discussion, also, is sampling current thinking about the appointment process in the United Methodist Church.

Chapter 3 affords a biblical, historical, and theological perspective of core values. Scriptural materials from both Old and New Testaments testify to the necessity of rehearsing, renewing, and refining core values in the life of the faith community. In the same way, core values figure decisively in church history through formation of creeds, reformation, and struggles with world events. Emerging from this is a theology that reflects and supports the core value structure of the church. And, in fact, different theologies will support different core value sets.

Chapter 4 describes methodology used to discover core values and bring those findings to bear on the writing of the church profile by the staff-parish committee for the appointment process. Specific tools employed in developing a deeper understanding of core values for both pastor and church are described.

Chapter 5 reveals what actually happened employing this methodology. Including a coding process to help determine the core values of Evangel Heights Church, the process invites the reader to creatively interact with the results of this project.

Chapter 6 allows time for reflection on these results and possibilities for future study. Readers are invited, again, to reflect on their own personal core values.

Open to God's leading, when churches understand the components of their identity, they can codify their core values, affirm them, and live them out. The results of core value discovery include vision, strategy for ministry, and an ability to evaluate. But the central purpose of this research is the process by which core value discovery leads to the creation of a core value statement used by the staff-parish committee in the appointment-making process.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Whether churches know it or not, they have a value system informed by personality, gifts, talents, passion, ability, and experiences multiplied a hundred or a thousand fold in their membership. Into the midst of a local church's value web the United Methodist Church appoints a pastor with a potentially different value system. A pastor's value system is likewise informed by personality, gifts, talents, passion, ability, and experience. The process of discovering values for the pastor includes an inventory of personal history, pastoral experience, and theological and biblical reflection. Individuals continually assemble and re-assemble life events for meaning and by so doing they construct a value system. The introduction to this personal value discovery begins here and concludes in chapter 6.

A Personal Discovery

A deep-rooted understanding of core values permeated the tiny town of Roselle, Illinois, home until seminary days. Everybody knew one another. Church connections assured the social integrity of the town. Little else, socially, existed. Fellowship picnics drew members and friends to Turner Farm, missionaries gave foreign coins to the children, youth queued up to play four-square in the church hall in the afternoon. Then

everyone gathered at the pond north of town to watch the fire department compete against neighboring town rivals in a water fight to move a suspended barrel like a tug-o-war. Life was good, safe, and value-driven. Unity, friendship and care dominated this small town in mid-America.

However, growth and change created questions about those values. Slowly this sleepy town realized that it was fast becoming a Chicago suburb. New houses brought new friends with different perspectives. These new friends did not particularly value the long held tradition of hopping on a bicycle to chase a fire engine down the street, laze the summer away watching road crews lay asphalt, or even enjoy four-square on Sunday afternoons. Nonetheless, growth was exciting! What a thrill to hear chairs being set up in the church sanctuary and hallways so teeming with people it would take what seemed a joyful eternity to move from one end of the church to the other. Though familiarity was comfortable, growth and change were valued as well.

The excitement of this growth was coupled with a felt need for something unchanging. Not linked to any particular style, for example, of worship; or appearance, as in architecture, this feeling found resolution in the enduring values of the church. The church reminded everyone of a connection to an unchangeable God. Father, a part time police officer, sweeping his spotlight over the bedroom windows at night while the rest of the family slept afforded this constancy. Here is God who shines light on all things in the midst of change. And here was a community of faith where acceptance and love prevailed. And so from childhood days, attention has been given to the underlying meaning of life. Childhood imagination would wrap arms around the universe or strain to

reach God in the uttermost parts of the cosmos. Such were the confident years of childhood.

Teenage years brought heightened fear and uncertainty about life; the boldness of earlier years slipped away. Fortunately, encouragement came through family and two uncles who were Baptist pastors, and a growing awareness of the church's message of God's overwhelming power, loving acceptance, and gracious freedom. A personal relationship with Christ proved to be the anchor in the storm. Besieged by fear throughout later school years, acceptance and peace prevailed in the church resulting in a call to ministry. It did not take long, however, to discover that church essentially mirrored the larger world. The church was not a place of escape, but the crucible in which to contend with a fallen world. The place where this child encountered an infinite God and this youth found value, identity, and peace, was also the place where this pastor often contended with broken church communities.

Twenty-five years defined by seven appointments as pastor within the United Methodist Church have now passed. Four of those appointments were in the role of healer. Many churches languish without clear understanding of purpose or identity. Value-based struggles repeatedly occur. New appointments and the desperate look on the faces of staff-parish committee members told the whole story. The churches had been through so many battles that they were but shadows of what they had been a few years earlier. Marked by precipitous loss of membership and attendance, stagnant ministries, confusion about goals and objectives, they had lost their identity. For whatever reason—weakness in the appointment process for pastors, identity confusion, lack of pastoral vision, inability of the staff-parish committee to recognize their values and

communicate those values and needs to the denomination, a church/pastor mismatch because of a lack of clarity of core values on both sides—pastors and congregations experience constant frustration. This personal experience is evidence enough that the church must find a bright new path for the future that sustains the whole body.

In the opening months of an appointment the question is often asked, “Who are we as a church?” The honest response on two occasions was, “We are a dying church.” Fear or anger becomes the normally expressed attitude. Division and loss of members and attendance deepens the death spiral, but most churches do not know how to address loss. Perhaps a church’s or a pastor’s season of discontent may be the work of God. If that be the case, then all the more reason to engage in prayerful value analysis.

Admittedly, there is a certain fascination with looking over the fence at other seemingly healthy churches. Some churches communicate clearly who they are and why they exist. One church in the Chicago area discerned prophetic core values in the area of social justice issues.¹ So powerful and unique was that call, that only a pastor with a similar value system could effectively lead that church. A casual glance across any conference reveals a handful of churches that have fine tuned their ministry to clearly project their core values to their community and denomination. If every church clearly knew their call, their identity, their core values, and acted upon them, and if the pastoral leadership complemented their local church value system, such a symbiosis could be the key to catapult the United Methodist Church into renaissance.

A church that clearly knows who they are in terms of value statements might begin to sound like this: “We are a church driven by social action seeking to impact the

¹ Wheadon United Methodist Church, formerly located in Evanston, Illinois, has now merged with the United Church of Roger’s Park in Chicago.

disenfranchised people of our community with the Gospel”; or, “We are a church with intense, heart-felt worship, seeking to reach emerging generations with God’s love in ways they understand”; or, “We are a church passionate about extending a hand of hope and message of love to the refugees of the world.” Either a church begins to publicly project their core values with statements like these or else they proclaim a nondescript, confused identity that projects lack of purpose. They do not glorify God. However, most staff-parish committees fall silent or tongue-tied when trying to identify core values during the appointment process. These observations and experiences drive this pastor to help form core value-driven ministries maximizing their impact upon a community with God’s agenda.

The Appointment-Making Process

During the appointment process the staff-parish committee represents the church. The committee, with church *discipline* defined responsibilities, cannot select a pastor, but, rather, receive an appointed pastor. It is incumbent upon the committee to seize every opportunity possible to communicate clearly the needs, values, and identity of the local church to the district superintendent within a short timeframe. Thus the staff-parish committee joins the bishop of the *conference* and a district superintendent in a well-defined process. Because every church must have a pastor, the late winter to spring appointment-making season can be a grueling and anxious period for all participants. At least three critical moments define this process. They are so predictable as to be formulaic.

The Take-out Session

The first moment, called the *take-out session* in the Northern Indiana Conference, gives the district superintendent and the staff-parish committee an opportunity to say “thank you” to a leaving pastor. As this session continues, the pastor is usually excused as the district superintendent continues with the committee to ask, “Now, tell me about your church needs and what sort of pastor you would like.” Not allowable in this process is a plea from the committee, “Could you give us a month to discuss this matter and get back to you?” The choreographed nature of appointment-making does not allow the luxury of reflection. District superintendents readily admit that much of what they usually hear from the committee echoes from church to church. In the worst case scenario, the staff-parish committee may be in shock if none of the members knew a move of their pastor was imminent. However, the mere mention of the district superintendent’s presence at the meeting might bring panic to veteran members of the committee. The pastor, too, may not have known about a move until a few days prior to this meeting. The *2004 Book of Discipline* (§ 430-432) outlines the responsibilities of the district superintendent to include consultation “with the pastor and committee on pastor-parish relations, taking into consideration the . . . needs of the appointment . . . and mission of the Church.”² The take-out is where most of this consultation takes place.

Matchmaking

The second part of the process is matching a new pastor to the church during meetings of the *cabinet*. The cabinet meets long and frequently from January to May each

² Harriett J. Olson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: 2004* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), § 431.

year to make appointments. This arduous task, steeped in prayer, continues until all pastoral positions fill. The phone call to the pastor can sometimes be rather mysterious, “We have an exciting church for you, please call the district superintendent of (another district) for the details.” A mad dash to the Conference Journal, if it hasn’t already been done, sends the pastor perusing the list of “exciting” churches in the new district. After making this contact, the pastor and new district superintendent take a “windshield tour” of the area and community. It is here the church profile becomes available to the pastor. The *Discipline* defines the church profile as reflecting “the needs, characteristics, & [sic] opportunities for mission of the charge consistent with the Church’s statement of purpose.”³ The *Discipline* further spells out the specific elements of the church profile to include the congregation’s setting (size, financial condition, history), convictional stance (theology, prejudices, spiritual life), forms of ministry within the church and outward to the community, and the function of pastoral ministry to fulfill the mission and goals of the church. Depending on the district superintendent, the appointment, for the most part is already set at this point. Unless something greatly unforeseen takes place, the appointment is all but sealed prior to the meeting with the staff-parish committee as in an arranged marriage.

The Take-in Session

Erroneously called an interview, the third step, the *take-in session*, convened by the district superintendent, essentially serves as a get-acquainted time (about ninety minutes in duration) between the pastor and staff-parish committee. The district superintendent sets the tone of the meeting, “Let me introduce to you your new pastor.”

³ Ibid., ¶432.

The committee has not seen a parade of candidates; they have not heard the pastor preach; they do not know beforehand who will be walking through the door. The pressure upon the district superintendent, the anxiety of the staff-parish committee, and the curiosity of the pastor and spouse (who typically attends the meeting) reaches a boiling point. Depending on past experiences, underlying feelings may pervade the environment of the take-in session. The members of the committee may trust or distrust the district superintendent or the process. The same may be true for the pastor. Because of the tenuous nature of this scenario, all parties involved could benefit from some common core values. But common values may be as absent as trust and comfort.

The Problem

This scenario is typical, but it is fraught with problems from the outset that can breed serious trouble. For example, most church profiles received by pastors fail to approach disciplinary standards. Furthermore, this pastor has yet to see a core value statement included in any church profile from any church in the appointment process. And yet core values are the prominent feature advocated by many authors on the subject of pastoral selection. What may astound, but not surprise participants in this system, is the reality that information shared in a church profile rarely comes into play as a *basis* for the appointment decision. Pastors know that other factors come to the fore in an appointment: salary, family needs, and location, to list the most significant determining factors—salary being the primary factor. Neither local churches nor pastor experience a defined, intentional process to engage in reflection of core values as they pertain to the selection of a pastor. *In spite of the critical importance of values to impact the well-being,*

of pastors and church, the current practice overlooks them. Thus, the district superintendent, who is placed in a vice grip of competing needs and demands, the staff-parish committee, and the pastor omit the most important issue during the appointment process, core values, even though core values figured prominently in the history of the Methodist movement and the mission of the church.

Aubrey Malphurs, who has perhaps written the single most important book on church core values, suggests a minimum 50 to 60 percent match on core values as a guide to indicate (not assure) that a church and pastor are at least initially operating with some sense of common understanding for ministry.⁴ Malphurs affirms this percentage level in his related book, *Being Leaders*.⁵ But Malphurs' materials are written from a congregational perspective. However, the United Methodist appointment system does not operate with the same understanding, for the diversity of United Methodist churches and the pressures of appointments allow little room for value discussion. Whether core values discussions can become a natural part of the appointment process is in itself complex, for a church must know its core values and articulate them throughout the appointment proceedings. Discovering the core values of a particular local church—or even finding out how a church can identify those core values—can be a daunting task. If core values can point to the uniqueness of God's call upon a particular local church and not to some generic, dust gathering document, the church should be able to fit core values acceptably into the appointment making process. These are the issues at the heart of this study.

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 67.

⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 225-226.

The Context

The context for this study, Evangel Heights United Methodist Church, set in one of Indiana's significant university communities, South Bend, is the church this pastor now serves. When appointed in June, 2005, it was a struggling church with an average of 150 in worship, down from a high of 263 four years earlier, and a \$250,000 operating budget.⁶ With foreknowledge of the prior pastor's retirement, the chair of the staff-parish committee conducted an informal poll of certain members in the congregation to identify expectations for the new pastor. Without knowing it, the chair informally did something similar to what this project proposes. His effort assisted the staff-parish committee to define an understanding of congregational needs. This process figured positively in the appointment process, but no clarity of core values emerged.

A written philosophy of ministry containing four key words, "teach, share, show, and grow" gave clues to the church value system. But this document never appeared in the church profile nor were there any references to it during the take-in session. The philosophy was uncovered in a set of new member orientation materials a couple weeks before pastoral duties began. The committee accepted the appointment based on personal observation and feelings, along with the stated needs of those in the church that were polled. The district superintendent responded to the needs of the pastor to move to South Bend and additional factors, including salary. This pastor, grateful to be placed in South Bend for family reasons, was looking for a church exhibiting spiritual depth and caring community. The appointment effectively took place for reasons other than core value reasons. Even though everybody left that meeting feeling God's answered prayer, the

⁶ Evangel Heights United Methodist Church, South Bend, IN official records.

underlying problem remains, no one is aware of the core values of the church. The general community and history of the congregation suggest some answers.

The Community

With a population of 108,000, The City of South Bend is the largest of St. Joseph County (population 265,000). South Bend joins Mishawaka, Granger, and a handful of other smaller communities, both in Indiana and Michigan, comprising an economic area called Michiana, a seven county area including two in Michigan, with 840,000 people.⁷ The Evangel Heights Church draws from four of those counties, including several families from Cass County, Michigan.⁸

The earliest recorded history of South Bend dates to the seventeenth century, when French explorer Robert René Cavalier Sieur de La Salle landed on the banks of the St. Joseph River. In December 1681, La Salle held a council with Native American leaders of the Miami which led to the Miami Treaties. But it wasn't until nearly 140 years later, in 1820, that Pierre Navarre built the first permanent structure on the north side of the river and yet another three years later that fur trader Alexis Coquillard established a post on the "south bend" of the St. Joseph.⁹ Slow growth marked the next twenty years, but then an event that would forever shape the destiny of the region took place, the founding of The University of Notre Dame du Lac (its full name).

⁷ Michiana census records, *Project Future*, <http://www.projectfuture.org/demographics.htm> (accessed August 2, 2005).

⁸ Evangel Heights United Methodist Church membership records, 2005.

⁹ South Bend, IN history, *City of South Bend*, http://www.ci.south-bend.in.us/History/History_of_South_Bend.htm (accessed August 2, 2005).

Notre Dame, perhaps synonymous with South Bend in the minds of football fans, was formed in 1842 by the Very Rev. Edward Sorin and six Catholic brothers. The land had originally been purchased by Rev. Stephen Badin, the first Catholic priest ordained in the United States. Interestingly, a Methodist state senator, John B. DeFrees was responsible for officially chartering the university by a special act of legislature on January 15, 1844. Thirteen years later, the Mother House of Sisters of the Holy Cross and St. Mary's college moved next to the Notre Dame campus from Bertrand, Michigan.¹⁰ In addition to these institutions, Indiana University South Bend and Bethel College (Missionary Church ties) may be found in the South Bend/Mishawaka communities.

About the same time as the founding of the University of Notre Dame, a wave of German immigrants arrived between the 1840's and 1860's. The population of South Bend hovered around 15,000 until 1847, when on August 15, twenty-two German immigrants landed in town, having made their way entirely by boat from Arzberg in eastern Bavaria. They had been encouraged by Johann Wolfgang Schryer, who had come from Arzberg four years earlier and had bought a forty acre farm eight miles south of the village.¹¹ From this growing German population emerged the early strands of Evangel Heights Church. Waves of Polish immigrants would come later with industrialization.

What created substantial growth for the community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like most industrial communities, has long since departed. The Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company, the world's largest producer of wagons along with Oliver Chilled Plow Works, employed 4,000 factory workers from within the

¹⁰ University of Notre Dame history, *University of Notre Dame*, <http://newsinfo.nd.edu/content.cfm?topicid=49> (accessed August 4, 2005).

¹¹ Gabrielle Robinson, *German Settlers of South Bend* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 11.

city limits alone and, in turn, provided massive energy for dynamic business growth that fed the rail industry. Increasing numbers of European immigrants created new business ventures. About the only truly immigrant business that remains began in 1901, The Philadelphia, a confectionery created by Greek immigrants.¹² But most large ventures have long since folded, even though memories and monuments remain. The Studebaker Mansion is now a restaurant. Churches built by the Studebakers, including St. Paul's United Methodist Church, still stand.

The Church Location

Evangel Heights, not one of the Studebaker churches, stands today at a significant residential crossroads on the eastern boundary between South Bend and Mishawaka and has a much more humble and austere background. The saturated zip code area for the church is home to 15,700 people.¹³ An imaginary circle extending approximately two miles around church will enclose Potawatomi Zoo and Park, Logan Center for developmentally disabled adults, group homes for developmentally disabled, Trinity School at Greenlawn (a private preparatory school), Indiana University South Bend Campus, Bethel College, a popular year-round Farmer's Market, the private Morris Golf Club, one of four South Bend high schools, three elementary schools, a dozen churches, and a housing area called Walnut Grove (one of the few remaining World War II housing developments designed for returning soldiers and their families). Everything from retirement housing to growing numbers of vacant homes, modest small homes to large

¹² John Palmer, *South Bend: Crossroads of Commerce* (Chicago, IL: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 101.

¹³ U. S. Census, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo_id=86000US46615 (accessed August 2, 2005).

old estates can be found within this area with wide economic disparity.¹⁴ Curiously, the church profile originally presented to this pastor read, “If you draw a six-mile circle around the church, it encompasses an area primarily made up of middle and higher priced homes.”¹⁵ This statement may reflect more perception than reality and portrays a church membership increasingly disconnected from the existing neighborhood.

Many of the prominent churches in the larger community are Catholic, including one within a block of Evangel Heights, but there are also several protestant mega-churches within several miles of Evangel Heights. One needs to typically travel to the growth fringes of the region, in particular Granger, to find these mega-churches such as Granger Community Church (United Methodist). The great housing spurts that took place in Evangel Heights’ neighborhood occurred in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Evangel Heights could quite possibly be considered a city church now since its location is a mere two miles from the heart of downtown.

The Church History

Having just celebrated its fiftieth year in ministry at the Ironwood site in 2002, Evangel Heights is a composite church of First Evangelical United Brethren and Lowell Heights Methodist Churches. The history of the church, assembled by Jill Simpson, Director of Care Ministries, reads in part:

The Evangelical Association had been in existence 51 years and its preachers on horseback had already penetrated into Indiana, when in October 1851 the Illinois Conference brought into being a new conference in the State of Indiana. In 1853, Bishop Seybert, Rev S. Dickover, and Rev. G.G. Platz came to South Bend to begin the work of the Evangelical

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Evangel Heights United Methodist Church profile, 2005.

Association in this city. The South Mission was created in 1854 . . . and the first church of 11 members began meeting in a carpenter shop. For its first 50 years the church was marked by growth, dissension, and turmoil. By the turn of the century, language became an issue, since most of the ministry had been in German. In 1893 the Conference established an English Mission in South Bend and First Church gave 31 members to this new congregation which was later known as Broadway Church. In 1907 English-speaking services were begun and by 1915 the preaching was entirely in English. With the merger of the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren Church in 1946, the church became known as First Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Another strand woven into the fabric of Evangel Heights United Methodist Church began in 1893 near Sorin Woods. Accounts vary. Was it Andrew Newpert, an Evangelical Association laymen, or David Bortock, a devout Dunkard, who was strolling near the woods on Sunday afternoon, when his attention was drawn to four girls sitting on a log listening to an older girl reading from a church school paper. Impressed by five children who liked Sunday School that much, Bortock made arrangements to use the home of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Newpert as a meeting place for a neighborhood Sunday School. Officially organized in 1899, the name "Lowell Heights Sunday School" was adopted. Rev. J. W. Walker, Pastor of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, soon began preaching services there on alternate Sunday afternoons. On June 12, 1899, Lowell Heights Church was organized as a Mission of Grace Church. By 1900 the congregation completed its first building at the corner of North Frances and E. Miner Streets. During the depression years the church went through difficult financial times with one half of its members on relief. Times improved and the debt was paid and the church prospered in the 1950's. But by the 1960's the neighborhood was changing, and the church was losing members at an alarming rate.

The time was now ripe for merger. In 1968 the national merger of the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren denominations was to occur. First E. U. B. was losing members because Studebaker was dissolving its corporation and many members were moving out of town to find work. Funds were needed to continue to pay for the church's new education wing. Lowell Heights continued to lose members. On October 3, 1967, anticipating union of the E. U. B. and the Methodist denominations, the two local churches voted to enter into a union at the 114 N. Ironwood address. Union was declared in an impressive joining worship service on April 14, 1968. Evangel Heights represented a merged name for a merged church. All debts were paid . . . and by 1975 Evangel Heights had three adult Sunday School classes . . . and 321 members.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jill Simpson, Evangel Heights United Methodist Church history (ca. 2002).

Since the merger in 1968, eight senior pastors have served the church with an average stay of four-and-a-half years. Only one pastor has stayed six years, two have stayed only three.

Staff Configuration

For a church its size, a wide variety of staff positions exist, including full time directors of Care Ministries and Christian Education/Youth, and an Administrative Assistant. Part-time staff include a Director of Music and custodial workers. Though not paid, the church also has a Parish Nurse, supervised by both pastor and a regional organization of Parish Nurses. The core staff, full time and directors, meet twice monthly and retreat at least twice a year for more in-depth training and visioning. Preschool and Parents Day Out personnel round out the staff profile for the church.

The Presenting Church Philosophy

The motto of Evangel Heights reflects the philosophy of the church: “Teach, Share, Show, Grow . . . in the Love of Jesus Christ.” The process of identifying these philosophical words took place while Stephen Beutler was pastor during 1991-1996. A full rendering of the philosophy statement adopted during his tenure reads as follows:

Evangel Heights United Methodist Church, as a part of the whole church of Jesus Christ, strives to make disciples who teach, share, show, and grow in the love of Christ as they exalt God within our fellowship by sharing that love with others and by offering Christ to the world.

Teach. Through small groups and classes, we will encourage people of all ages to establish and develop a vital relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, and become mature disciples who actively use their gifts and talents in ministry.

Share. Through worship, discipleship groups, Sunday school and outreach we will proclaim God's Word, offer Jesus Christ, and expand the kingdom of God.

Show. The Senior Pastor, staff, lay leaders and congregation will exemplify growing discipleship by being persons of character, persons of accountability, and persons of commitment in exercising their gifts and talents.

Grow. As a Church family guided by the Holy Spirit, we will be proactive, need-oriented, and intentional in ministering and welcoming all people to Evangel Heights United Methodist Church.¹⁷

Two church members wrote a song reflecting this philosophy:

Teach, Share and Show the love that's been given to you
and grow in the Lord.

Teach, Share and Show His grace and grow in the love of Christ.

Teach us Lord your ways. Share your heart with your children.

Help us show a dying work its need for the love of Christ
and grow in the love of Christ.¹⁸

The presenting climate of the church, however, some considered fell far from the philosophy. Sluggish attendance, voiced disappointment with the United Methodist system of appointment-making, internal struggles over the administrative work of the church, a fiasco over a new organ purchase, and internal squabbles about styles of worship plagued the leadership over the past two years. The church grew inward and protective through the turmoil. Topics raised at the first staff retreat centered on the reality of the philosophy statement. Indeed, every trend of the church contradicted the evangelistic and outreach applications of teach, share, show and grow. Additionally, the physical infrastructure showed a church that had lost its spark. A beautiful prayer chapel had been unused for years. Numerous leaders of the church stated on a tour of the building, "We haven't been over here in years!" Some hold onto bitterness about changes in the peanut brittle recipe, a huge identifying fund-raiser for the church for many years.

¹⁷ Evangel Heights United Methodist Church philosophy of ministry (ca. 1992).

¹⁸ John Clark and Chris Baker, *Teach, Share and Show* (n. p., ca. 1993).

All this seems to point in one direction, “We have lost our way and we no longer know who we are.”

Intentional reflection on core values at Evangel Heights raise questions about the true core values of the church, whether they bear any resemblance to the existing philosophy of ministry statement, what the church will ultimately discover about itself, how the staff-parish committee will incorporate core values into the church profile, and what impact this work will have upon the committee, especially in understanding their role in the appointment-making process. Perhaps this emphasis on core values may impact the appointment-making process in the future, given the larger denominational context.

Concerns

A major fear concerns merely developing a process whereby the church reaches internal consensus without gaining wider understanding of the work of the church. To be sure, consensus can and does play a significant part for many groups to identify their core values. For the church, however, biblical, historical, and theological reflection must figure substantially in the development of core values to guard against mere consensus building.

Another concern is developing a core value statement reflecting only generic aspirations (we value missionary support, we value biblical preaching) as opposed to a realistic understanding of unique identity that would include an honest appraisal about areas of need or spiritual growth for the local church. Arguably, all churches hold certain values in common, but those core values should reveal and express God’s unique call

upon a church as it relates with the community and world. It can also be argued that churches become complacent and tend to look more favorably upon themselves than they should.

The final concern extends outward to denominational tensions related to the appointment process. Many seek to reshape, some to dismantle, the appointment-making processes to allow the United Methodist Church to experience revival. Possible changes to the appointment process remain unclear, but it is felt that a more empowered laity factors into a denomination that will no doubt strive to re-invent itself over the next generation.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN CHURCH CORE VALUES

Is it heretical to suggest that itineracy is already dead, or at least in the last stages of dying, and that the corpse is undermining the mission, ministry, and authority of the church? Or is the transformation of itineracy, yes, even the resurrection, still a possibility?

Donald E. Messer, *Send Me? The Itineracy in Crisis*

Almost every institution or company in America displays a statement of values, sometimes simplified into a memorable motto: “The face and voice of positive Christianity to the world,” The Crystal Cathedral; “Lost people matter to God and they ought to matter to the church,” Willow Creek Community Church. Values even merit an official study, called axiology, more recently called value theory,¹ which is concerned with the worth and identity of a person or group. This definition helps describe the purpose of this study: the worth and identity of Evangel Heights United Methodist Church. But this study extends beyond discovering identity to fashioning a discrete core value statement that can be used in the appointment process. To do this, two salient features are explored: first, church core values; and, second, current discussions regarding the appointment system of the United Methodist Church as it pertains to core values.

¹ Through a consulting process axiology was introduced to this researcher while taking the Hartman Profile, a value-oriented inventory. The Hartman Profile and value theory will be covered in greater detail later in this chapter, and again in Chapter 4.

Church Core Values

Without question, values form the core of our being. We may not articulate values on a daily basis, but we know them to be the truths by which we conduct our lives. They are the building blocks upon which decisions are made, resources are allocated, and visions and goals are applied. For many churches values make up an unspoken code from which to draw strength in time of change or crisis—unspoken because many churches simply “know” when something “feels” right or not. As unspoken codes, values do not have to be written or articulated, but all churches have values, good or bad, spoken or unspoken.² Articulating “why” we do things the way we do may result in an almost automatic response, the off-hand stamp of approval, “Because we have done it this way as long as we can remember.”

Significant strides have been made recently in exposing the church, the mainline church in particular, to the necessity of returning to core values. Many authors call their readers’ attention to the core values of the ministry of God’s Word and witness, though there is still movement toward modern day pietism expressed through spiritual disciplines (Richard Foster³) reflecting a sacramental quality of Christian life. But more often than not, there is greater popularity (and marketing effort) in the area of evangelism. In some hurting churches this effort becomes a frantic grasping for straws as the church rushes toward implementing a program without the necessary spiritual work of understanding its

² Malphurs, *Value-Driven Leadership*, 95.

³ Richard Foster has written many works on spiritual disciplines including *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex and Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985) and *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). The reader may find helpful the following: Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995); Dwight H. Judy, *Christian Meditation and Inner Healing* (New York: Crossroads, 1994); Roy Lawrence, *The Practice of Christian Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

core values that will allow that program to succeed. Whether a new program or ministry works depends upon whether or not the core values of the church will support its implementation. Since values emerge from the being, collective identity, and history of a church; emerge from collective experiences that question or challenge the past; changes or additions may destabilize and confuse or it may bring about greater cohesion and sense of purpose. In her work about transformative learning, Patricia Cranton points out that change in values is a “disorienting dilemma” that calls into question past practices. It sets in motion a process whereby beliefs are critically examined so that change in core value or practice may take place.⁴ Faced with survival issues, many mainline churches may be more ready to change than in the past.

Many best-selling books and online materials on church values clarification, analysis, and reflection are available through John Maxwell’s INJOY Ministries⁵ and Christianity Today⁶ which present web-site based workshops and studies to help churches explore values. As lines between church and corporate world increasingly blur, business borrows the language and concepts of church. Tim Sanders, for instance, in his business-oriented bestseller, *Love Is the Killer App*, advocates an essentially value-driven

⁴ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 114.

⁵ John Maxwell has written extensively on leadership, giving valuable insight into core values from the perspective of the pastor or leader: *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998); *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes Into Stepping Stones for Success* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000); *The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day: Revitalize Your Spirit and Empower Your Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000); *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player: Becoming the Kind of Person Every Team Wants* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002); and, Maxwell’s *Injoy* site, <http://www.injoy.com/leadershipwired> (accessed on August 18, 2006).

⁶ The Leadership Resources website of Christianity Today, <http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com>, contains downloadable workshops for a fee on “Church Health,” “Core Values,” and “Assessing Church Needs” (accessed August 18, 2006). Other resources related to values and the United Methodist Church may be found at Duke University’s *Pulpit and Pew*, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu> (accessed on August 18, 2006).

understanding of business relationships that easily translates into Christian core values.⁷ That such a familiar and theologically sound value as love could be considered a “new idea” is surprising, but maybe for business it is.

Clearly there is a re-emergence of the Great Commission as a foundational value for all churches; however, many churches do not regard it as an *actual* value, merely an *aspiration*. Many churches do little to share the Gospel with those outside the church,⁸ in spite of the fact that the first encounters with Jesus in the Bible involve evangelism: “come and see,”⁹ and one of the last Gospel directions is, “Go and baptize”¹⁰ Affirming the centrality of this invitation and this command, Rick Warren emphatically states: “Jesus founded the church, died for the church, sent his Spirit to the church, and will someday return for his church. As the owner of the church, he has already established the purposes, and they’re not negotiable.”¹¹ Unfortunately, purposes such as evangelism are hardly noticeable in some church settings.

Without Christ, there is no church; it becomes merely a social organization for the benefit of those who belong. It is Christ however, who makes the church distinctive. Kent Hunter grieves the abduction of the church by the very leaders and influencers of the

⁷ A “killer app,” applies a “new idea that either supersedes an existing idea or establishes a new category in its field.” Tim Sanders, *Love is the Killer App: How to Win Business and Influence Friends* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002), 11.

⁸ 2005 North Indiana Conference Journal membership records indicate a 52 percent decrease compared to 1968 membership at the time of the Methodist/Evangelical United Brethren merger. In 2005, 43 percent of North Indiana Conference churches received no new members by confession of faith. Another 31 percent received between one and five new members by confession of faith. One church alone accounted for 24 percent of all new members by confession of faith over against 560 churches in the conference.

⁹ John 1:46.

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19.

¹¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 98.

church who claim Christ as they assume and claim the values and views of the world.¹² In contrast, what the church needs is particularly Christian values-driven leadership.

Outlining many of the essential components in understanding values, Aubrey Malphurs has written the essential book for this matter in *Values-Driven Leadership*. Malphurs presumes, however, a church with a call polity, not an itinerant appointive process. It would be difficult, for instance, in the United Methodist appointive process to follow the prescription: “Agreement on at least 50 to 60 percent of the core precepts is necessary for a good marriage.”¹³ Since the take-in session is not designed for the kind of interaction that could reveal similar values, such a matching is neither encouraged nor actively sought as we saw in chapter 1.

Though Malphurs implies no guarantee of a successful “marriage,” he does suggest at the outset: “Any church or ministry organization that overlooks the importance of core beliefs does so to its detriment.”¹⁴ To support his argument Malphurs lists ten benefits to churches engaged in value discovery.¹⁵ Churches can:

1. Determine distinctive identity of ministry
2. Dictate personal involvement
3. Communicate what is important
4. Embrace positive change

¹² Kent Hunter, *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up with God's Vision* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 24.

¹³ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

5. Influence behavior of the church body
6. Inspire people to action
7. Enhance credible leadership
8. Shape ministry character
9. Contribute to ministry success
10. Affect strategic planning

The last benefit listed confuses many church leaders and pastors—the relationship between values and strategic planning. Malphurs’ explanation is most helpful: planning essentially answers the question, “What do we do?” while values answers the question, “Why do we do what we do?” A strategy clarifies “where” we are going while values become the engine driving the church forward. Values always precede and drive an action. Pastors and parishioners have probably all been in situations at some point or another where the question is asked, “Why are we doing this?” This values-driven question focuses on the validity of an action. Additionally, strategy is forward-looking while values are based on the body of tradition, identity, and beliefs of the past and present. In summary, Malphurs claims that values express passionate, sacred, core beliefs driving ministry, decision-making, and goal setting.¹⁶ Such an understanding needs to pervade the appointment-making process.

Similarly, core values were uncovered in a 1997 study of 1,899 attendees of the Vision New England annual congress who were surveyed on what made for a healthy church. In order of importance, based on a nine point scale, they emphasized worship and

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

spiritual disciplines. Though churches define ministries in varied and unique ways, common areas of expression are evidenced in this study. The ranked findings are listed in table 1.¹⁷

Table 1
Ten Signs of a Healthy Church

1. God's empowering presence (do I feel God's Spirit)	8.78
2. God-exalting worship	8.43
3. Spiritual disciplines	8.31
4. Learning and Growing in community	8.21
5. A commitment to loving and caring relationships	8.19
6. Servant-Leadership Development	8.02
7. An outward focus	7.90
8. Wise Administration and Accountability	7.56
9. Networking within the Body of Christ	7.03
10. Stewardship and Generosity	6.94

Though any of the attributes listed above may become a defining point, or unifying value, for a church, Malphurs suggests the need for churches to broaden their spectrum:

An organization or church ministry would be wise to examine its essential beliefs to determine if it has a unifying or overarching value. Many do. However, this unifying value may or may not be desirable . . . [since] most of the churches with

¹⁷ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Characteristics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 23.

a single, unifying value prove inadequate, because they emphasize some aspect of the Great Commission and not the Commission as a whole.”¹⁸

Rick Warren concurs: “There is no single key to church health and church growth; there are many keys. The church is not called to do one thing; it is called to do many things. That’s why balance is so important.”¹⁹ Certainly “balance” is important, but the power and appeal of popular books like Warren’s can tempt a church into uniformity rather than inform a unique call or identity.

Church Versus World Values

Many writers have undertaken to “discover,” not “create” as Warren insists, a healthy church’s core values. Another approach has been to compare and contrast church values with world values. For example, Kent Hunter uses the metaphor of “windows” to describe core values. After interviewing 15,000 church leaders, whom Hunter calls “influencers and decision-makers,” he has isolated ten basic worldviews, or “windows,” “that are in conflict with the biblical worldviews of how the church should function.”²⁰ Hunter refers to these as “ten core values that make or break a healthy church life.”²¹ These ten conflicting values appear in table 2. One who has much to say about healthy churches, Peter Steinke, who is noted for work in church family systems, concludes, “[C]hurch families can fritter away their destinies by letting their own reptilian processes tell them what to do. Those who do move toward their destinies do so through *metanoia*,

¹⁸ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 51-52.

¹⁹ Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 128.

²⁰ Hunter, *Windows*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Table 2
Kent Hunter's Biblical Windows

1. **The Window of Purpose:** make disciples, but Christians influenced by the world see church as a place of fellowship where God's love is shared with each other.
2. **The Window of Comfort:** God takes more interest in individual character than in their comfort, but the world wants comfort at all costs.
3. **The Window of Image:** go to the world, but the worldly church expects the world to come to it.
4. **The Window of Priorities:** seek God's will above everything else, but the world declares that one's own priorities are more important than God's.
5. **The Window of Stewardship:** give back from God's blessings, whereas the world dictates that one give to church budgets.
6. **The Window of Financing:** God pays for what he orders; the world asks, "How much does it cost?"
7. **The Window of Change:** the biblical record encourages by tradition: the living faith of the dead; whereas the world catches individuals in the trap of traditionalism, the dead faith of the living.
8. **The Window of Leadership:** expect the pastor to train members for ministry; the world model believes the pastor is hired to do ministry for the congregation.
9. **The Window of Teamwork:** spiritual gifts empower individuals for God's work, but in the world individuals work because they have been drafted or elected.
10. **The Window of Attitude:** the Bible proclaims, "You know God can," but the world acts as if God can't.

a changing of mind, an imaginative response, an acceptance of anxiety's challenge to change and grow."²² Exploring and reflecting on core values may put us at odds with

²² Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (New York: Alban Institute, 1993), 125.

cherished world-views. This may lead to wrestling with God, others, and self, but the outcome may be a transformed life and church.

Rem B. Edwards, a proponent of the use of the Hartman Profile²³ for the religious community, also speaks to the conflict between church and world:

I concentrate primarily on worldliness and ideology as ways of falling short and living valuationally impoverished lives. Worldlings live primarily for *things* and *social status*; but in gaining the world, they lose their moral and spiritual souls. Ideologists live almost entirely in the ivory towers of their minds, but they do not really have a life, and they can be a serious menace to others who do not fit neatly into their ideological schemes and prejudices.²⁴

Some religious communities, not a “serious menace to others,” do create, however, an idealized, separate life from the world. For example, Cornelius J. Dyck, recorder of Mennonite history, points out that the Amish community would more than likely see themselves as counter-cultural. Oppression and persecution of these Anabaptist reformers throughout the 1500’s and 1600’s firmly established Menno Simons’ core values; “conversion, the congregation, discipleship and discipline. He believed that the faithful church would always be a suffering church.”²⁵ To this day the Amish separate themselves from the worldly community while living out their core values.

But other religious communities value a transformative approach to the world, some even aggressively so. Former President Jimmy Carter in his 2002 Nobel speech in Oslo commented, “The present era is a challenging and disturbing time for those whose

²³ Developed by Robert S. Hartman during the years after World War II, the Hartman profile attempts to measure values and is especially accurate in detecting intangibles. It is used, in part, by many companies to select leaders for appropriate positions. Its method compliments the approach that will be taken to determine the values of Evangel Heights Church. See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of the Harman Profile and its approach.

²⁴ Rem B. Edwards, “Being and Becoming All That We Can Be,” *The Hartman Institute*, <http://www.hartmaninstitute.org/html/AllthatWeCanBe.htm> (accessed May 11, 2006).

²⁵ Cornelius J. Dyck, ed. *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*, 3d ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 47.

lives are shaped by religious faith based on kindness towards each other.”²⁶ Carter

received surprising criticism for his comment prompting this response:

There is a remarkable trend toward fundamentalism in all religions—including the different denominations of Christianity as well as Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Increasingly, true believers are inclined to begin a process of deciding: “Since I am aligned with God, I am superior and my beliefs should prevail, and anyone who disagrees with me is inherently wrong,” and the next step is “inherently inferior.” The ultimate step is “subhuman,” and then their lives are not significant. That tendency has created, throughout the world, intense religious conflicts. Those Christians who resist the inclination toward fundamentalism and who truly follow the nature, actions, and words of Jesus Christ should encompass people who are different from us with our care, generosity, forgiveness, compassion, and unselfish love. It is not easy to do this. It is a natural human inclination to encapsulate ourselves in a superior fashion with people who are just like us—and to assume that we are fulfilling the mandate of our lives if we just confine our lives to our own family or to people who are similar and compatible. Breaking through this barrier and reaching out to others is what personifies a Christian and what emulates the perfect example that Christ set for us.²⁷

The Christian community continues to wrestle with its relationship with the world, its separateness or porousness. It seeks to discover whether it stands separate, but alongside the world; whether it is a community that works to transform the world from within or without; whether it is the one true community for whom all must conform. Certainly it is not a community with a single voice, but multiple voices and values. But this diversity may cause its voice to be so muffled that a hurting world cannot hear a unified word of concern from the church. Or, perhaps the modern day church does indeed follow the pattern set by the world, as Hunter suggests, and has failed, in the words of Jesus, to “be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”²⁸ Jimmy Carter claims that the church seems content to

²⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2005), 30.

²⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

²⁸ John 17:23.

spend its energy on “internecine warfare” instead of “theological or religious questions that involved our common goal of worldwide evangelism, or how to implement the teaching of Jesus Christ in our daily lives.”²⁹ In light of these observations, some consideration must be given to conflict as it relates to core values.

Value Conflicts

Conflicts do arise within the church due to values. Much of Hunter’s consulting and research deals with values identification as a way of avoiding conflict. A focus on values is critical for the church of the future that faces rapid fire change economically, technologically, socially, and even theologically. A church at disconnect with its value structure will be unprepared to deal with change and likewise unprepared to adequately deal with conflict. This is especially true for churches with an appointive process. Numbers of conflicts will increase as changes come to the congregation and community. Malphurs, again focusing on values, asserts: “To resolve conflicts, the ministry needs to view behavior as the result of a set of essential driving values. If you are able to bring to the surface and clarify the values fueling the conflict, you are well on your way to resolving the conflict or to determining if a resolution is even possible.”³⁰ Clearly communication is a critical component of conflict resolution. Macchia, referring to John Powell’s *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* describes the five levels of communications: cliché (non-sharing), fact (sharing what you know), opinion (sharing what you think), emotion (sharing what you feel), and transparency (sharing who you

²⁹ Carter, *Values*, 44.

³⁰ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 40.

are).³¹ Values come through most genuinely at the fifth level, but in the midst of conflict communication often is absent or suffers.³² Until churches are comfortable enough with honesty to communicate lovingly, which takes enormous maturity, little progress can be made in identifying values or in healing.³³ Moving toward transparency, or intrinsic valuation,³⁴ must be mastered by a local church so that it can truly emerge into a more complete understanding of its identity as the Body of Christ.

Often referred to in discussions of values, Acts 6 serves as a biblical laboratory for value-centered conflict resolution. Both Hunter and Malphurs spend time with the disarming little story of how the Jerusalem church reflected upon core values to resolve the problem of a growing church. Ministry cannot be done effectively without the church understanding core values, nor can conflict resolution. Malphurs concludes, “These beliefs are so important that they must always come before ministry policies, practices, and goals The important lesson here is that you do not start with the latter and work back to the former Many organizations violate this principle.”³⁵ In chapter 3, the

³¹ Macchia, *Healthy Church*, 105.

³² H. Beecher Hicks, Jr. offers insight into conflict in *Preaching Through A Storm: Confirming the Power of Preaching in the Tempest of Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Ministry Resources Library, 1987). In a related lecture at United Seminary, Dayton, OH, 16 August 2006, Hicks describes conflicts as “Atmospheric pressures: a culture of disbelief, the abandonment of ecclesiastical authority, the idolatrous worship of worship, the decline of the social Gospel, and impoverished preaching,” suggesting, like Hunter, a worldview conspiring against biblical core values. Hicks suggests that conflicts may be symptoms of deeper problems.

³³ In *Mastering Conflict and Controversy* by Edward Dobson, Speed Leas, and Marshall Shelley (Portland, OR: Christianity Today, Multnomah, 1992), 85-94, Leas outlines the five stages of conflict escalation: predicaments, disagreement, contest, fight/flight, and intractable. Without proper understanding of values and a means to articulate core values, churches are in danger of opening themselves up to increasingly potent controversies.

³⁴ Intrinsic valuation is the identity of unique values used by the Hartman Profile. See chapter 4 for a fuller exploration of this concept.

³⁵ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 20.

discussion on Acts 6 will show how core values apply to the well being of church community.

In today's church, however, many violate Malphur's principle by attempting to enter ministries and program with little or no understanding of values. These churches often wonder why programs fail to get off the ground or lose steam. Thus a constituency ill adept at articulating values may become susceptible to any wind that blows. Hunter and Malphurs agree that cultural impact upon the church has been great, so great that the church has had much of its value system hijacked. Malphurs suggests that 85 to 90 percent of what churches do today is influenced by internal church culture, not the Bible.³⁶ He includes the perception that the pastor is the hired servant or professional ministry on behalf of the church. But when it comes to values, the Bible is clear, according to Malphurs, that the pastor is the guardian of the keys: "First, he [or she] needs to be the vision and values cultivator . . . initiating and developing the vision and beliefs. Second, he [or she] communicates the vision and values. Finally, he [or she] is the dream and values clarifier . . . rethinking and further refining the vision and values of the church."³⁷ This is no human task alone. Any who seek this road will need divine guidance, even intervention.

The Appointment Process

Aubrey Malphurs, Kent Hunter, Rick Warren, and Stephen Macchia, in addition to numerous church-related web sites devoted to values understand well the call process

³⁶ Ibid., 93.

³⁷ Ibid., 94.

of congregationally-styled churches. Their materials also serve as excellent guides for strengthening existing ministries in the United Methodist context. In fact, the United Methodist Church has recently inaugurated a site to assist local churches build a comprehensive understanding of mission and identity.³⁸ But an understanding of values is not systematically written into the way the itinerant pastor of the United Methodist Church is appointed.³⁹ This project presents a unique interface between core values and the appointment process. The missional values of pastoral appointments are deeply imbedded in the history of American Methodism and continue to be the subject of concern for critics of the appointment process today. From the time of Francis Asbury, a pattern not of “ecclesial democracy; but [of] aggressive evangelistic endeavor”⁴⁰ conditioned itineracy. A deeper look at this historical insight follows in chapter 3, but a review of the description of the appointment process as stated in the *Book of Discipline* is appropriate:

Clergy shall be appointed by the bishop, who is empowered to make and fix all appointments in the episcopal area of which the annual conference is a part. Appointments are to be made with consideration of the gifts and evidence of God’s grace of those appointed, to the needs, characteristics, and opportunities of congregations . . . with faithfulness to the commitment to an open itineracy. Open itineracy means appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, or age Through appointment-making, the connectional nature of the United Methodist system is made visible.⁴¹

³⁸ In 2006, The General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church initiated an interactive website for churches called the *Church Vitality Indicator*. Participating churches pay an annual fee based on average attendance allowing them to assess their strengths in four areas: believing, belonging, behaving, and leading. <http://www.cvindicator.com> (accessed August 5, 2006).

³⁹ Sheldon Duecker, *Tensions in the Connection* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), 48.

⁴⁰ Russell Richey, William Lawrence, and Dennis Campbell, eds. *United Methodism and American Culture*, vol. 4, *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 11.

⁴¹ *The Book of Discipline*, ¶430.

Furthermore, it is understood by the clergy, to varying degrees, that “They offer themselves without reserve to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, as the appointive authority may determine.”⁴² Without reserve? Tensions and confusion surround this idealistic, albeit disciplinary, understanding of itineracy.

Confused Value Systems

John Wesley’s goal for the itineracy to “spread scriptural holiness throughout the land,” has been complicated by exorbitant seminary costs, personal goals, salary and family needs. Bishop Kenneth Carder, addressing the Duke University Divinity School in 2001 observed: “The most pervasive logic or vision for ministry today is shaped by the market and the values of consumerism rather than by the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴³ In that same address he notes the work of John Cobb in a 1994 lecture at Vanderbilt University that charted worldview logic of churches shifting away from religion to nationalism to economism over the centuries. Consistent with Hunter’s observations earlier cited, these worldviews are evidenced in worship, evangelism, the staff-parish committee and pastoral appointment. “Our Methodist itinerant system, born in mission,” exclaims Carder,

has been hijacked, commandeered by the pervasive values of consumerism. Morale and motivation among pastors are largely dependent upon market forces of salary and institutional advancement, rather than sharing in God’s mission in the world. Competition replaces connection rooted in covenant. Successful ministry is measured by the same standards as success in the corporate world of the market—salary, benefits, upward

⁴² Ibid., ¶332-333.

⁴³ Kenneth L. Carder, “Market and Mission: Competing Visions for Transforming Ministry,” Hickman Lecture, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, 16 October 2001, *Pulpit and Pew*, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu> (accessed June 17, 2004).

mobility, ranking with co-workers. The appointive itinerant system is almost paralyzed by the multiple market-driven demands placed upon it by pastors and congregations. Consultation resembles contract negotiations more than strategy for missional deployment. The result is that ministers become hirelings who use the sheep, especially those in small congregations, as stepping stones in career advancement.⁴⁴

Though we can argue that our time is different from Wesley's in significant ways, the human character remains the same. As example, Wesley cites a minister who moved from one parish that had paid him 50 pounds to one paying 100:

Why does he go thither? "To get more money." A tolerable reason for driving a herd of bullocks to one market rather than the other But what reason for leaving the immoral souls over whom the Holy Ghost had made you overseer!⁴⁵

Richard Heitzenrater, Professor of Church History and Wesleyan Studies at Duke Divinity School, similarly observes that the Wesleyan connectional system was designed by Wesley with himself as the "link" connecting local societies to maintain connection and commitment to Methodism's mission.⁴⁶ With Wesley as the linchpin, itineracy provided utmost freedom to spread scriptural holiness throughout a world parish devoid of ecclesiastical or national boundaries.⁴⁷ Itineracy, under Wesley's control, created missional freedom. Today, itineracy appears to thwart the Methodist movement. In fact, the *Book of Discipline* acknowledges the central locus of operation to spread scriptural holiness: "*local churches* [author's emphasis] provide the most significant arena through

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ John Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," February 6, 1756. Kenneth L. Carder reflects on this statement in "Ministry as Commodity," *Circuit Rider*, vol. 29, no. 3 (May/June 2005), 24-25.

⁴⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 140.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102. See also Heitzenrater's report to the Council of Bishops concerning Wesley's understanding of and central control in itineracy, "Take Thou Authority: Ministerial Leadership in the Wesleyan Heritage," *Pulpit and Pew*, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu> (accessed on June 18, 2004), 22.

which disciple-making occurs.”⁴⁸ Wesley would no doubt agree, but this emphasis upon the local church cannot displace Wesley’s understanding of mission to the world. The emphasis on itineration in Wesley’s day assured movement and mission. Today, however, with more emphasis placed upon the local church, mission is no longer assured.

The observations of Carder and Heitzenrater are confirmed by research conducted by Becky McMillan and church leaders such as Bishop Sheldon Duecker and Thomas Frank. According to McMillan,

The mission of the church is to bear witness to God’s sovereignty and the mystery of the cross. It is to be an instrument of transformation to the world around itself, but the structure of clergy salaries reveals how deeply the church itself has been transformed by the market forces of individualism, efficiency, and competitiveness. The church cannot excuse itself because of the prickly issues surrounding the structure of clergy salaries. Intentional reflection and direct confrontation of the problems inherent in them must be the first of many steps to help it reclaim its mission of covenantal community, justice, and grace.⁴⁹

The consequences, according to former district superintendent Riley Case, is that Methodism has lost the unity of doctrine and mission of earlier generations.⁵⁰

Duecker and Frank go so far as to say that the constraints upon the appointment process extend far beyond salary issues creating a “union” atmosphere. Frank identifies a discrepancy between intention and reality in most conferences: “[D]espite their missionary intention, conferences retain many attributes of a closed union shop. Once an elder is in the fold, she or he naturally expects to move up gradually through the system

⁴⁸ *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 120.

⁴⁹ Becky McMillan and Matthew Price, “At Cross Purposes? Clergy Salaries: Market and Mission,” *Pulpit and Pew Working Paper*, October 2001, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu> (accessed June 18, 2004), 26.

⁵⁰ Riley Case, *Evangelical and Methodist* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 16.

from smaller to larger churches, from lesser to greater salaries.”⁵¹ As early as 1983, Duecker saw the trends developing toward increased professionalism, laity’s desire to share in the appointive decision making powers, and clergy’s desire to become more settled.⁵² Donald Messer calls this the “seniority system,” by which seminary students are “led to believe they can step on the bottom platform of an ecclesiastical escalator only to be carried upward toward some form of professional ‘success’ with the passage of time.”⁵³ Frank concludes: “The itineracy persists, but its qualities as a missionary order of preachers have given way to a more professional model with itinerants less and less able simply to go where sent.”⁵⁴ These comments suggest that clear scriptural or missional core values are missing in the current state of the appointment process. If the appointment process struggles to keep scriptural core values centrally focused, then the process needs to turn elsewhere to assure the vitality of the church.

Tendency Toward Maintenance

Where we turn is to the local church. But if judicatories find it difficult to emphasize core values through the appointment process, the local United Methodist church may find equal difficulty. Unlike congregational churches that have operated for generations with the understanding that locally they carry out the mission of the larger church, the local United Methodist Church has seriously lagged in picking up this larger

⁵¹ Thomas Edward Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, 2006 ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 220.

⁵² Duecker, *Tensions*, 34.

⁵³ Donald E. Messer, ed., “Whom Shall We Send? An Introduction to the Debate,” in *Send Me? The Itineracy in Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 17.

⁵⁴ Frank, *Polity*, 67.

responsibility because of the current state of the appointment process. At worst, United Methodists succeeded in setting up an entitlement program. *If more responsibility shifts to the local church in the appointment process, the staff-parish committee must recognize the role of itinerant pastor to be more than the care and feeding of the local membership.*

As it stands now, however, United Methodist core values are directed primarily to the care and feeding of the flock. This concept fits precisely with Hunter's worldviews noted earlier. Likewise, Russell Richey comments: "[W]e need to underscore the obvious point—namely, that Wesleyan itineracy had not been designed to bear the ordinary offices and to serve the congregational needs that over two centuries it increasingly assumed."⁵⁵ Wesley made the distinction, similar to that of Acts 6, between the function of daily care and feeding to be carried out by gifted laity or class leader, and the function of ministry of the word to be carried out by the itinerant elder. To be sure, the lines are sometimes blurry, but the itinerant elder of the past was the evangelist, while the day-to-day care and feeding was the primary responsibility of lay and small group leaders.

Today, healthy, growing churches that have captured this concept and clearly articulate their values and goals are concerned with taking up the historical Wesleyan call, "To spread scriptural holiness." In contrast, the value structures of most United Methodist and similar mainline churches more often reflect the purpose of small groups: giving comfort, care-giving, accountability, and chaplain support. These are all admirable values, but clearly not outreach-oriented and not the historical purpose of itineracy. The focus of the contemporary mainline church resembles the Acts 6 church *if they had not* moved beyond the issue of waiting on tables. Wesley distinguished the place for such

⁵⁵ Russel Richey, "Itineracy in Early Methodism," in *Send Me? The Itineracy in Crisis*, ed. Donald E. Messer (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 28.

work, in the small groups, in the Societies. If the church functions differently from small groups it is not evident in the line of questioning from most staff-parish committees, which suggests that little consideration is given the role of the appointed pastor to the greater values of word, sacrament, evangelism found in the doctrine of the church.

In speaking of the doctrine of the church, John Harnish reiterates the classic nature of word, sacrament, and service (also order, or ordering the ministry of the church) reflected in the ordination vows of the United Methodist clergy. This work affirms “the continuation of the apostolic task . . . to ensure faithful transmission of the gospel from generation to generation and to assure the church of appropriate leadership.”⁵⁶ Currently, however, with localized clergy carrying out the functions of word, sacrament, order and service he notes, “Though unintended, the emphasis on servant leadership could contribute to an overemphasis on a somewhat passive role of clergy inside the Church, rather than as itinerant evangelists on the vanguard of missionary outreach in the world. Instead of being understood as a missional strategy, itineracy is all too frequently seen as a maintenance system by both clergy and congregations.”⁵⁷ Maintenance fosters an attitude of growing demands upon clergy; as more attention to local needs is given, more may be expected.

The View From the Pew

In addition to growing demands on the clergy, expectations and pressures on the congregation are also expanding. Adair Lummis, research sociologist at the Hartford

⁵⁶ John E. Harnish, *The Orders of Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 74.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 133-134.

Institute for Religious Research at Hartford Seminary raised these questions: Do search committees have clear opinions of the qualities and abilities they want most in their next pastor? What clergy characteristics and competencies do they want most and why? Is the kind of pastor the lay search committee, or staff-parish committee, wants the kind of pastor they really need—or can realistically get?⁵⁸ These questions are based on a congregational system, but her research rings true to basic human feelings, regardless the polity. Lummis cites lay leaders who feel they made mistakes in choosing clergy, but also believed that they were still competent to make future decisions. She agrees completely with Malphurs in that “[T]he better the match between pastor and congregation, the more stable and less conflicted the church—which is a definite plus for regional leaders.”⁵⁹ Reflecting on both call and appointive processes, Lummis states, “My interviews indicate that lay persons rely heavily on their own experiences with a former pastor or two to form their opinions about the desired abilities and attributes of a new pastor.” And, “Despite their efforts to help congregations with the search process, and regardless of how long the search process takes, regional leaders sometimes perceive a committee’s final choice of pastor as emotionally biased or arbitrary.”⁶⁰ For example, a committee might say, “Give us a pastor who can relate to us, preach well and care for us.” John Dart’s title to an article is telling: “Young, Male and Married, What Search Committees Want.”⁶¹ Bishops

⁵⁸ Adair Lummis, “What Do Lay People Want in Pastors? Answers From Lay Search Committees Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders,” *Pulpit and Pew Research Reports*, No. 3, Winter 2003, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu> (accessed June 17, 2004), 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ John Dart, “Young, Male and Married: What Search Committees Want,” *Pulpit and Pew*, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/youngmale.html> (accessed June 17, 2004).

and district superintendents deal with these demands regularly. Local churches care about their own personal needs so much that they are out of touch with biblical core values.

In an effective functioning of the appointment process, if local United Methodist churches begin to shoulder more responsibility for decision-making, they must be equipped in ways they have not been before. If a trend develops toward blending certain aspects of appointment and call systems, it is imperative for the local church, represented by the staff-parish committee to see more clearly the importance of the biblical, historical, and theological values of the church. Lummis indicates that most judicatory leaders encounter search committees who simply want a “good preacher” and a pastor who has a consistent view of worship. Church committees have not strayed far from the traditional theological doctrine of the church as purveyor of word and sacrament, but they have not considered values and missions beyond the most obvious.

Pastors may accentuate the feelings of laity by holding an attitude toward itineracy, “Just leave me alone to do my work!” This reaction may reflect a sideline reformation taking place; not an overt, radical shift from the norm, but a slow, plodding discontent and reluctance, even withdrawal of emotional support from the itinerant system. Lyle Schaller concludes: “It is only a slight exaggeration to suggest United Methodists are replaying the European Protestant Reformation five hundred years later in America. Can the laity be trusted?”⁶² They must. Ironically, lay people have asked the same question of the denomination for years.

⁶² Lyle E. Schaller, *The Ice Cube is Melting: What Is Really at Risk in United Methodism?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 61.

View from the Cabinet

At the root of trust is a common understanding of identity and mission, or core values. According to Duecker, “Many of the tensions we have considered herein are the result not of polity but of a lack of common purpose in mission If The United Methodist Church is to minister effectively in its third century, *leaders and members must develop, understand, and articulate a clear sense of identity and purpose.*”⁶³ Those words were written over two decades ago. When the College of Bishops, meeting October 1, 2003, were asked about their dreams for church development, one response was “Using biblical models as a foundation to remember the purpose of the church and invite people to it over and over again.”⁶⁴ When faced with the question “What if we were in this same conversation ten years from now and we’re still going down hill?” the responses included a need to have a burden for souls, making evangelism and mission a priority, reshaping the United Methodist Church to focus upon “the least of these” and reclaiming purpose and calling for congregations.⁶⁵ These sobering words from the College of Bishops suggest that the issues of values clarification and the appointment process are far ranging. To entertain the thought that ten years from now we would still be in the same predicament signals an inability to make systemic changes.

Caught in the cross-fire is the district superintendent. In a meeting with the Cabinet of the North Indiana Conference to discuss this project, district superintendents listed several needs and concerns, including ways to approach committees to discover

⁶³ Duecker, *Tensions*, 117.

⁶⁴ United Methodist Church, College of Bishops meeting, unpublished minutes, 1 October 2003.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

true values and a process to get a better church profile reflecting more realistic understandings of identity. They are concerned that some committees are anomalies, not reflecting the whole church. One district superintendent candidly said, “If there are ten moves in a year, that means I may have as many as forty meetings on top of my regular schedule: take-out meeting, a consultation with the incoming pastor, a windshield tour, and a take-in.”⁶⁶ The intensity and extent of the effort of a district superintendent to understand and empathize with the local church to broker the best possible match between pastor and church is staggering, given all the expectations.

Some bishops feel increasing frustration in their disciplinary function of “fixing” the appointment as local churches cry for more voice in the consultation phase of appointment. Some pastors feel trust diminish in the bifurcation of the appointment process between those who could be considered the “untouchables” (who cannot easily be moved, if at all) versus the “appointables.” These conflicts and issues illustrate that the United Methodist Church has become merely a shadow of the movement Wesley envisioned that could quickly move into new ministry areas for the sake of the Gospel. It may be that local churches with clearly articulated values are increasingly better equipped for this task than conferences. Bishop Michael J. Coyner of the Indiana Area, describing appointment-making as “a balancing act”⁶⁷ recalls advice given him by Bishop Leroy Hodapp when he first became a district superintendent: “Anybody can make one good

⁶⁶ The United Methodist Church North Indiana Conference Cabinet, meeting with author, Indianapolis, Indiana, 11 January 2006.

⁶⁷ Michael J. Coyner, *E-pistle for the Indiana Area United Methodist Churches*, 21 March 2006, e-hum@lyris.nicumc.org. Bishop’s letter to pastors and leaders of the North Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.

appointment; the real trick is to make hundreds of them every year.”⁶⁸ In a later message to the churches, Coyner warned of a growing sense of isolationism in both contemporary culture and the church, “We simply cannot and must not give in to that self-obsessive feeling of caring only for ourselves. There is too much at stake. We are called to be United Methodist Christians who follow in the footsteps of John Wesley who said, ‘The world is my parish.’”⁶⁹ We need to reclaim this core value.

The Future of Itineracy

Increasing numbers of people express their views on the issue of the efficacy of itineracy. Lyle Shaller calls for a radical dismemberment of the entire appointment structure,⁷⁰ similar to the Korean Methodist Church in 1978, resulting in more than doubling the number of adherents and of churches.⁷¹ But others are more careful in their rhetoric. In a private conversation, Bishop Duecker indicated, that the situation has only grown worse since his writing *Tensions in the Connection* in 1983.⁷² He commented, “The tensions of professional expectation, salary, clergy couples, ethnicity, politics, career location of spouse, role of Board of Ordained Ministry, role of local pastor, clergy effectiveness all conspire to drive Methodism away from [its] original purpose of itineracy, ‘spreading scriptural holiness.’” The May/June 2005 issue of *Circuit Rider*, a

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Coyner, *E-pistle*, 13 February 2006.

⁷⁰ Schaller, *Ice Cube*, 192

⁷¹ Joon Kwan Un, “When Korea Abolished Guaranteed Appointments,” in *Send Me? The Itineracy in Crisis*, ed. Donald E. Messer (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 39.

⁷² Sheldon Duecker, interview by author, Fort Wayne, IN, 12 May 2004.

publication for United Methodist clergy is devoted to the discussion of “Itineracy.” In this issue, retired bishop Joe E. Pennel, Jr., promotes the need for full discussion, “We are at a time when the General Conference needs to review the itinerant system to see if it can be adaptable and flexible enough to meet the present day need to spread the gospel.”⁷³

Bishops find their hands tied by many different forces while working toward more creative appointments. John Harnish, more positively, eagerly looks to the re-formation of the order of elders and deacons for signs of hope that the church will re-ignite its passion for the lost.⁷⁴ This project asserts that in conjunction with any attempt at denominational levels for reform, there needs to be a concurrent revitalization of the work of the local church and the staff-parish committee to identify core values and articulate them clearly throughout the appointment process.

Conclusion

To conclude that all United Methodist churches and pastors agree upon and adhere to a fine and detailed understanding of theology, mission, worship, evangelism, education or purpose would be a gross error. When a pastor is appointed to a United Methodist Church, the “United” of the name does not mean unanimity. Historical, regional, cultural, and theological differences dominate. William Lawrence writes, “So our first general principle about our theology of ministry is this: our sources and guidelines for theological reflection are multivalent; they have many meanings and many values. Our theology of ministry has no single source. We are a much more complex

⁷³ Joe E. Pennel Jr., “The Itineracy” *Circuit Rider*, vol. 29, No.3 (May/June 2005), 4-5.

⁷⁴ Harnish, *The Orders of Ministry*, 135.

people than that.”⁷⁵ Such a concept explains, and may encourage, the multiplicity of views and diversity of purpose.

Christianity holds values that are not always, perhaps seldom, in harmony with the world. Almost every writer on the subject of the itineracy acknowledges that churches (and pastors) increasingly employ worldly value systems and not faith-based values. Fortunately for the Christian and the church, enduring, eternal values can be drawn upon, but these values are placed in earthen vessels. Worldly values encroach and pervade upon the church, causing ongoing struggles as the church reaches out to touch the broken-hearted. In much the same way, the incarnate Jesus walked among a misunderstanding world that failed to see his light.

Chapter 3 focuses on Christian values as informed by Scripture, history (tradition), theology and contemporary experience (our own and others). This categorization reflects to large extent Wesley’s quadrilateral, Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. These all come into play as church members on a staff-parish committee gather to deliberate the cabinet’s selection of a pastor for their church and create a fascinating dance of expectations: values, both worldly and Christian, personality, and power displayed in the itineracy.

⁷⁵ Richey, *Questions*, 159.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Until we learn what it means to be empty of self and full of Christ, we will continue to misread Paul's theology of leadership, status, power, and wisdom. Until then, the *ekklesia* will continue to play the game of power politics with the ministry, an all too human and too Corinthian game indeed.

Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*

Because the main focus of this study, to uncover core values in the church and apply those values to the appointment process, an understanding of core values as presented throughout history is necessary. Certain patterns and aspects of core values emerge from biblical materials, others from post-biblical church history, and still others from theological foundations. The faith communities of the Old and New Testaments and the historical church, who sought to understand their core values, provide relevant insights, as do faith-filled leaders who, like the Apostle Paul, contend against "my own countrymen and false brothers and sisters."¹ This background forms the basis on which to build a theological understanding of core values that holds the experiences of these faith communities together. Each story represented in this chapter invites readers to question what their response would have been had they been present, what personal core value is supported or challenged in each story, and, what core value tensions are created in each story between the faith community and the world.

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:26.

The Old Testament Discussion

The genealogies of Genesis evidence a divine purpose—God is grooming a people and already calls for value responses of faith and obedience. Fast on these genealogical catalogs, community forms, sealed with God’s covenant in Exodus. This study actually begins a later, as God begins to deliver the land of the Ammorites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites¹ into the hands of the covenant people under Joshua’s leadership. As Joshua nears the end of his life, he calls for the renewal of the covenant.

Joshua 24: Value of Committed Response

In the strange new Promised Land, the proclivity of the people to chase after foreign gods is accentuated. They do not have to create a molten calf as in the Exodus wanderings;² now the Hebrew people have access to the gods of many nations, in addition to the ancient gods of their forefathers. In part patterned after the Hittite kings and suzerainty treaties,³ Joshua calls the people’s attention to no less than eighteen actions of God, indicated by the use of the personal pronoun “I,” before making his appeal to the people for committed response during the covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem: fear the Lord and serve Him, reject the gods of your forefathers, and reject the gods in whose land we now reside.⁴ Regarding the possible connection of this pattern of the covenant renewal to the ancient Hittite treaties, William T. Koopmans questions,

¹ Joshua 24:11.

² Exodus 32:22-24.

³ Bernhard W. Anderson with Steven Bishop and Judith H. Newman, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 89-90. Of particular interest is the historical recounting of benevolences by the suzerain.

⁴ Joshua 24:14-15.

“How closely must texts resemble each other in order to prove literary dependence . . . ? How many constant elements must be present in order to demonstrate a form, or to use the usual term in this case, a covenant formulary?”⁵

Regardless the origins of the form, the people are all too willing to say they will comply with God, but with increasing intensity Joshua calls on the people a second time (24:19-21), even a third time (24:22-24), to declare their allegiance. If the second and third calls were necessary, Joshua must not have been satisfied with the initial response of the people. He must have known human nature and the record of faithfulness of his own people too well, and he must have sensed that the people were not making a total commitment. L. Daniel Hawk suggests that Joshua “predicts disobedience and disaster.”⁶ Hawk entertains the thought whether Joshua’s questions indicate a warning or a prediction: “In either case, Joshua confronts the nation with a future that portends calamity,”⁷ and finally concludes that this covenant renewal ceremony conveys a “dark premonition” that Israel will forsake YHWH.⁸ As noted earlier, changing core values takes a transformational experience (Cranton). Joshua must have realized that religious experience can be falsified when people get caught up in a crowd and want to please and be accepted.⁹ However, religious experience elicits response in both word and action. It

⁵ William T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative* (Sheffield, England: JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press: 1990), 82.

⁶ L. Daniel Hawk and David W. Cotter, eds., *Joshua: Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 274.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 60.

involves the whole person.¹⁰ Joshua understands this double response and calls for action, first for himself, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,”¹¹ and then for the people to give up the gods of their forefathers. Joshua must have foreseen the trials ahead for the fledgling faith community; they have not arrived, but only begun. In fact, Hawk indicates the farewell address of Joshua “. . . represents a beginning, rather than the promised ending. More precisely, it signifies the *return* to a beginning. Joshua’s words speak little of fulfillment, but place both Israel and the reader back in the realm of promise. The promises and admonitions uttered by Joshua echo those given to Israel in the period before it entered the land. The Israel now within the land is little different than the Israel which awaited entry into the land.”¹² Similarly, Bernhard Anderson clearly indicates that the Shechem experience is not a covenantal ceremony, rather a renewal to allow a new generation to claim, “This is our story too.”¹³

As reminder and warning to his flock, Joshua counsels, “See! This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us.”¹⁴ Every time one passes that stone, it serves as a reminder of the covenant promises.¹⁵ Hawk calls this a “proleptic charge against the people.”¹⁶ That is, it brings a taste of future reality into the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Joshua 24:15.

¹² L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press: 1991), 129.

¹³ Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 132-133.

¹⁴ Joshua 24:27.

¹⁵ See the similarities to the role of the mountains in Micah 6:1-2. The mountains are more enduring than the people’s faith.

¹⁶ Hawk, *Fulfilled*, 138.

present, a concept further defined later in this chapter. Commitment to upholding the values of the covenant, not only in word but also in deed, secures the future livelihood of the faith community. Joshua is right about what is truly valued: committed response proves necessary.

2 Kings 22-23: Value of God's Word

Over time the people eventually cried out for a king so as to be like other nations.¹⁷ With an unsteady start to monarchy, the reign of the Davidic line is prophesied,¹⁸ conceived,¹⁹ and comes full term.²⁰ But within three generations, with civil war threatening, Israel becomes a kingdom divided. The biblical record repeatedly remarks that most kings “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” Three hundred years then pass since King David ruled, with nearly a hundred of those years after the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria. Only Judah remains, and with it, the temple in Jerusalem.

King Josiah begins his reign as an eight-year-old. Although a child ruler might bode ill for Judah, 2 Chronicles, the southern kingdom's account of royal history, indicates that at age sixteen Josiah “began to seek the God of his father David,”²¹ and, contrary to most of his predecessors “did right in the eyes of the Lord.”²² In fact, Josiah, according to Erik Eynikel, reportedly “did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left’.

¹⁷ 1 Samuel 8.

¹⁸ 1 Samuel 13:13-14.

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 16:13.

²⁰ 2 Samuel 5:1-5.

²¹ 2 Chronicles 34:3.

²² 2 Kings 22:2.

This occurs nowhere else in Kings and is rare in the OT. It means to follow the path of righteousness which brings long life, wealth and honour (Prov. 3:16).²³ At age twenty-four, when Josiah begins a complete makeover of the temple, the Book of the Law is found. Evidently it had been lost, certainly not used. Josiah's community had fallen away from the instruction God gave: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night."²⁴

In response to finding the Law, the king's orders reveal alarming degradation of the covenantal core values of the people: "... [R]emove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah ... do away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah ... remove the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord ... tear down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord."²⁵ Political treaties, wars, human nature had all taken their toll. The next set of instructions for the people to ready themselves for the Passover provides a clue to how long the people had ignored God's commands: "Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the Kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed."²⁶ Predictably, the reforms of Josiah, though God-centered, did not remain in the hearts of the people. But do not think that Josiah was completely untouched by syncretism. The situation was much more complex as Erik Eynikel points

²³ Eric Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: 1996), 117. The discussion on righteousness relates well to Isaiah 58 in the next segment of this chapter.

²⁴ Joshua 1:8.

²⁵ 2 Kings 23:4.

²⁶ 2 Kings 23:22. From a liberation theology perspective, Shigeyuki Nakanose, in *Josiah's Passover: Sociology and the Liberating Bible, The Bible and Liberation Series* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), chapter 3, views the reforms and use of Passover by Josiah as an attempt by the ruling class to centralize power during the decline of the Assyrian empire.

out that both Hezekiah and Josiah “used in their royal temple an image of a four-winged scarab and the winged sun disk (Egyptian symbols).”²⁷ In fact, Shigeyuki Nakanose, writing from a liberation theology perspective, notes, “Very little is known about what exactly happened after the inauguration of cultic reforms, more precisely the Passover. However, it is not likely that the people, particularly in rural circles, fully accepted cultic reform.”²⁸ It appears that even reform at its best is selective.²⁹

Like the stone in Joshua’s covenant renewal, God’s Word serves as a reminder of core values. Without commitment to those values followers run the danger of temporariness illustrated by Johnson, “An experience of beauty [such as a concert] can possess [certain] components of [religious experience]; the music can be given a certain ultimacy and intensity and can . . . engage every aspect of the person . . . I leave the concert profoundly moved and perhaps even shaken, and I can’t stop [humming a tune], but I return the next day to my ordinary life.”³⁰ However moved by Josiah’s experience, his generation of subjects returned to their ordinary life, evidently preferring the values of the next “evil” king. Marvin A. Sweeney reminds that “Josiah is aware of the futility of his actions. . . . Consequently, Josiah’s reform measures are carried out with full

²⁷ Erik Eynikel, *Josiah*, 209.

²⁸ See note 25 above. Nakanose, *Josiah’s Passover*, 32.

²⁹ The use of Zodiac and seasonal imagery is witnessed on the mosaic floors of many synagogues sites in the lower Galilean region during the Summer, 1981 Duke University (Durham, NC) Israeli archeology dig, Eric and Carol Meyers, dig directors. Certain amounts of syncretism seem accepted or at least tolerated for many generations to the time of Jesus and Paul.

³⁰ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 60.

knowledge that they will not affect the future of Jerusalem and Judah.”³¹ God’s Word, however, remains unknown to and unacknowledged by them as constant guard and witness. Adding to our understanding of core values, this experience lends itself to the conclusion that even divinely inspired core values are neither pure nor lasting from generation to generation in the hands of humanity.

Isaiah 58: Value of Righteousness

Without action, values become mere aspiration, lacking the passionate commitment to action that characterizes a true core value. Jesus refers to this commitment and change as “bearing fruit.”³² Whether ritual or righteous living, true core values find expression in some form of action. As illustration, Isaiah 58 provides exposition of righteous living within the faith community.³³ R. L. Harris, G. I. Archer, and B. K. Waltke point out that righteousness connotes “conformity to an ethical or moral standard” on at least three levels, “ethical, forensic and theocratic.” The ethical, according to them, involves the individual’s interactions “through conformity to standards set out in the word of God.” The forensic is “the equality of all, rich and poor, before the law.” The theocratic “involves the nation of Israel.”³⁴ God calls the people to *right action*. In so doing, God recognizes unworthy values and their resulting actions.

³¹ Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 45. In this argument, Sweeney refers to the oracle of Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14-20 and YHWH’s decision to bring punishment to Judah in 2 Kings 23:26-27. This may be a true indication of Josiah’s character to do right in spite of the larger historical implications of Judah’s actions.

³² Matthew 7:16.

³³ See also Micah 6:6-8 or Isaiah 1:10-17.

³⁴ R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 493.

Through Isaiah, God's dissatisfaction is expressed: "For day after day they seek me out; they *seem* eager to know my ways"³⁵ A doubt pervades these words. This author's emphasis on *seem* indicates the confused state of human value systems that place more emphasis upon peripheral, comfortable, or non-risky endeavors than upon what is of first importance.

Fasting as it was exercised was not sufficient cause for God to turn to the people, for Harris asserts, it requires intention to seek justice which includes taking care of the poor and needy, not just denying oneself of food.³⁶ Isaiah insists that righteous living is compassion-conditioned, justice-driven and spirit-inspired. Righteousness, conditioned by compassion for it demonstrates a clear, penetrating desire to care for the poor, the forgotten, the outcast, and the hurting. It is driven by justice, understanding responsibility and consequences, loosening chains, breaking yokes and setting oppressed free. And spirit inspired, indicated by Isaiah and echoed by Jesus: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor"³⁷ Isaiah 58 describes the fruit of committed response with this result: "Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear"³⁸

These Old Testament words indicate that anything could be, and indeed was, valued. But the community of faith recognized that a certain set of core values assured health, right relationship with God and others, and success. To them, living out covenantal core values resulted in committed response to God, following God's Word,

³⁵ Isaiah 58:2.

³⁶ Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 493.

³⁷ Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21.

³⁸ Isaiah 58:8.

and righteous action that cannot be counterfeited. Perhaps Joshua was so insistent on a response and Josiah so vehement in cleansing the temple and all Judah because they knew God is not fooled. The truth, however, is that neither are others. Deep within the roots of the Old Testament, God penetrates the façade of humanity to massage the soul. When we open ourselves completely to God's work, we realize what Johnson describes as true religious experience—and what can be called true religious core values.

The New Testament Discussion

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also provides a context for value systems. Wayne Meeks warns those who are on a value search, "The meaningful world in which those earliest Christian lived . . . was a Jewish world. But the Jewish world was part of the Greco-Roman world. If therefore we are looking for some 'pure' Christian values and beliefs unmixed with the surrounding culture, we are on a fool's errand. What was Christian about the ethos and ethics [were the] new patterns they made of old forms, to hear the new songs they composed from old melodies."³⁹ He describes a diverse and complex culture that shaped, influenced, and challenged early Christians.

The Resurrection Community: Value of Transformational Experience

The history-changing new event came in the form of the resurrection. Paul writes to the Corinthian community, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."⁴⁰ To him, the resurrection becomes the divine affirmation of all that

³⁹ Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christian*, vol. 6, *Library of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 97.

⁴⁰ I Corinthians 15:14.

came before in Jesus' life, teaching, ministry, and death. A new community formed through the resurrection experience. Commenting on the power of that experience Johnson observes,

Despite the diversity within earliest Christianity . . . a certain unity of experience and conviction was sufficient to distinguish this collection of people from others in the Mediterranean world and to provide the basis for its life, movement, change, and growth. This implicit unity [was] centered on the presence of transforming power among them because of the resurrection of Jesus.⁴¹

This is a community that would be built on love, and like Christ radiate humility. Gerd Theissen argues the cataclysmic effect of these values: "Christianity introduces into the pagan world two values from the Jewish tradition which are new in form: love of neighbour and humility (or renunciation of status)."⁴² He contends that the Sermon on the Mount so radicalizes these qualities that it "asks too much of human capabilities."⁴³ For instance, Jesus repeats the message of the prophets in the Sermon on the Mount. Opposing the show of religion without the deeper value of righteous living, he advises his listeners when they give, when they pray, when they fast, to do so to serve people and not for the intent of impressing God. In the mean time, the gospel writer John affirms that God's loving grace and forgiveness, directed toward humanity, creates a community built on values which make radical love and humility possible. At his resurrection, Jesus contends, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."⁴⁴ As troubling as the second part of that statement is, when it is

⁴¹ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 184.

⁴² Gerd Theissen, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁴ John 20:22.

placed in the context of Jesus' resurrection actions, forgiveness must be the default response. To the thief, Jesus promises, "Surely you will be with me in paradise."⁴⁵ When Thomas doubts him, Jesus graciously receive him, "Put your finger here; see my hands."⁴⁶ And finally, the reinstatement of Peter shows a similar three-part cadence as Joshua's covenant renewal, "Do you love me? Then feed my sheep."⁴⁷ In most of these cases the action response called for signals a commitment indicative of true core values.

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20, a baptism formula,⁴⁸ contains explicit instructions for those who participate in Christ: go into all the lands, baptize, and teach to obey the things commanded. Reassurance is given that those who "go" will not go alone, but will share a divine mission. Similarly, in Acts, Jesus instructs the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until power comes upon them by the Holy Spirit, so that then they may go to all the ends of the earth.⁴⁹ A draft of the plan for the future community of Christ is being laid out by the Master Architect who will become the cornerstone⁵⁰ and foundation.⁵¹ There shall be a community of love, humility, forgiveness, and grace, with a mission to teach these tenets to the ends of the earth by the authority of the resurrected Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁵ Luke 23:43.

⁴⁶ John 20:27; Luke 24:38.

⁴⁷ John 21:15-17.

⁴⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 19.

⁴⁹ Acts 1:4, 8.

⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:20.

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 3:11.

This community came into existence because of the transformative power of the resurrection. Acts 2:42-47 echoes the resurrection teaching. Concisely summarizing the heart of the emerging church, Witherington concludes, Acts 2 gives us “our first summary glance at the interior life of the early church,”⁵² devoting itself to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, in other words, “the church at its best.”⁵³ These are the core values of the early Christian community.

Acts 6:1-7: Value of Decision Making

However all is not ideal. Stories like Acts 6:1-7 of disagreements between the Hebrews and the Hellenists indicate that Luke is not fixating on a perfect society. This story consistently appears in studies of core values (see chapter 2). Luke points out that the number of followers is growing, and included are a wide variety of people including Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews. When the Greek Jews complained that their widows were not receiving food, the complaint caught the attention of the Twelve, who immediately determined that this situation was “not right.”⁵⁴ They judged the “rightness” or “wrongness” of the charge based on their core values. The leadership of the church immediately evaluated the situation and compared the present need to the core values established in Acts 2:42 of “ministry of prayer and of the word.”⁵⁵ Waiting on tables, though resulting in many positive, endearing moments for the Twelve, would clearly not

⁵² Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 156.

⁵³ Ibid. 157.

⁵⁴ Acts 6:2.

⁵⁵ Acts 6:4.

be a core value for the leadership, in spite of its value for the larger community. Modern day staff-parish committees might be curiously dismissed if they questioned an incoming pastor, “How are your restaurant management skills?” The Twelve appear to be wise in choosing seven others from among the followers who were full of spirit and wisdom.⁵⁶ This story stresses a clear point: the local church examined its core values in light of this new development and made ministry and leadership decisions accordingly, which led to the health and growth of the church. This story offers a powerful example of value clarification emerging out of response to need, and every decision being based on some form of value judgment whether that value is stated or not.

Acts 10: Value of Personal Experience

In addition to this disagreement and its settlement, and far outweighing the decision about the distribution of food, events are fermenting that will define the church's identity, forever. Growth precipitated confusion. Irresistibly Jesus attracted sheep from other folds,⁵⁷ raising questions. Did these new people need to be circumcised? For some the answer was obvious, “Yes!” But it was not so clear to others. Peter, who had recently experienced a dream-like vision at Cornelius' house, concluded, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts [people] from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”⁵⁸ As Peter explained this vision, it is possible to sense a shift in core values. However steeped those around Peter were in Jewish tradition, they also

⁵⁶ Acts 6:3.

⁵⁷ John 10:16.

⁵⁸ Acts 10:34.

placed a high value upon personal experience in light of the resurrected Christ. It may have taken some convincing, but the results became clear: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life,”⁵⁹ finally concluded the Jerusalem council.

The church reached a final determination at the Jerusalem Council.⁶⁰ Theissen comments:

[The history of primitive Christian religion] began with a departure from the ritual sign language of Judaism (by giving up circumcision and the food laws). It was completed by the formation of a distinctive narrative sign language for Christianity (as a unity of myth and history in the basic narrative of the Gospels). It safeguarded its social foundation by the development of an ethic which permeated the whole of everyday life; the obligation on the part of groups to live in a new way which had not been inherited from ‘ancestors’, but for which one had to make a conscious decision.⁶¹

Demonstrating the power of Christ through the lives of the Gentiles, the council’s decision simply advised abstaining from food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality, but omitted mention of circumcision. The Council’s decision essentially unified the church around the core value that “through the grace of our Lord Jesus are we saved.”⁶² Without doubt, core values are deeply held and powerful, because they are based in personal experience and choice. Even Joshua could argue that point. This one aspect of core values, personal experience, does not produce a panacea, as both the Old Testament and Paul can well attest.

⁵⁹ Acts 11:18.

⁶⁰ Acts 15.

⁶¹ Theissen, *Earliest Churches*, 209. All of chapter 11 is relevant to this study.

⁶² Acts 15:13.

I Corinthians 1, 15: Value of Unity

In contrast to Jerusalem, Corinth appears to share few core values. What values they shared were not Christian. In the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul chastises the church as they sought power, affiliation, and wisdom, “I follow Paul; I follow Apollos; I follow Cephas; I follow Christ! Is Christ divided?”⁶³ When Paul makes his impassioned plea: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought,”⁶⁴ the appeal is not an appeal to unity for unity’s sake, but to unity in Christ. Even Paul’s life demonstrates the inevitability of disagreements in the application of core values as Paul and Barnabas opt to follow different ministry directions.⁶⁵ Their decision, though, establishes an essential core that drives the church forward in its mission and that binds all believers throughout time and across the miles. Again and again Paul returns to this core throughout his ministry.

Paul reminds the Corinthian church of this core value in creedal form: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter”⁶⁶ Implicit in this verse is the passion Paul attaches to preaching and spreading the good news. A passion John Wesley shared resulting in his insistence on itineracy. This is a core value: that which we receive, we pass on. And what we pass on is none other than the activity of Christ Jesus.

⁶³ I Cor. 1:12-13.

⁶⁴ I Cor. 1:10.

⁶⁵ Acts 15:36-41.

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:3.

Summary

Scriptures have partially defined aspects of core values for the faith community. These values are based on the transformative experience of an encounter with God and a radical reordering of one's life around a value system different from that of the world. This new value system calls for constant rehearsal by the people and dedication from leaders who are willing to call the people to this value system as encountered through God's Word and personal experience. Even when new situations arise, leaders apply extant values to emerging needs. Furthermore, the vitality of the value system motivates certain actions leading to community health. These principles can also be applied to the post-biblical church.

History's Dialogue with Scripture

The Nicene Creed, Luther's Reformation, Wesley's revival, and the relationship between church and state in World War II Germany comprise the salient historical issues studied. Each of these events, significant in its own right, lends important insight into the concept of values. The first three issues essentially deal with issues from within the church, while the last deals with pressures external to the church. Oversimplified, to be sure, each of these events is complex and contains a mixture of causative events and reactions.

The Creed: Value of Rehearsing

The faith community's need to rehearse core values has already been illustrated through covenant renewal, referencing God's Word, and reinforcement from leaders.

When the community creates a creed it compresses the community's faith identity into a concise statement, arguably a core value statement. Biblical study, theological reflection, personal experience, prayer, guidance by the Holy Spirit, and political exchanges and power all impact the result. Creeds become theological boundary markers or frames of reference for core belief systems. For Christians, the formation of creeds is a move in the direction of orthodoxy (the understanding and agreement upon right beliefs) in addition to orthopraxy (the understanding and agreement upon right actions and practice of the faith),⁶⁷ the latter being dominant in Acts 2:42 and Acts 6. Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that Christian creeds emerge out of the creedal statements of Scripture such as the *Shema Israel*⁶⁸ or Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 already discussed in this chapter.⁶⁹ The creed calls for "communal and personal commitment," and expresses "unique loyalty," through a "compressed expression."⁷⁰ These compressed creedal expressions have their parallel in Scripture and develop in response to heretical theological expressions or heterodoxy (false teaching).⁷¹

In summary, the creed addresses developing orthodoxy much like the experiences of Acts 10-15. As new experiences and expressions figured prominently in the inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles into the growing number of Christ-followers, new understandings of the identity of God became the central focus of debate for Christians in ensuing generations. The Nicene Creed is a case in point.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Creed*, 9.

⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁶⁹ Johnson, *Creed*, 10, 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21-36.

At the heart of its development, the Nicene Creed embodies an entangled debate over the relationship between *persons* of the Trinity, God, the Son, and The Holy Spirit, specifically over the words *ousia* or *homoousios*.⁷² Referring to these language difficulties in Nicea, Gardener C. Taylor, in a message at United Theological Seminary, commented, “We have no semantic resource.”⁷³ In other words, human expression of the divine has limitations. For the purpose of this study, the *essence* of the creed as a collective value statement is the focus. The doctrine of the Trinity is assumed today but probably no better understood by most modern day Christians than by church leaders gathered at Nicea in 325 A.D. Essentially designed to ward off the Arian controversy, whose followers advocated a psychological or psychic phenomenon in encountering Jesus rather than a physical incarnation, the creed attempted to silence the controversy and unify the church around a central understanding of God, incarnate Jesus, and Holy Spirit—one God. Discussions as to the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit must have occupied Christian thinking for many years leading up to Nicea, for Luke recounts that Paul ran across disciples in Ephesus who “have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”⁷⁴ And like the Jerusalem Council, the Nicene experience works much the same way in creating a central core value statement addressing the needs of a specific time, but also serves to build a foundation of core values for the future church to

⁷² For a summary of the debate and the linguistic struggles in the development of the Nicene Creed consult Owen Thomas and Ellen Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3d ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 75; Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 2; Donald K. McKim *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), chapter 1; and, Johnson, *Creed*, chapter 1.

⁷³ Gardner C. Taylor, Opening Worship (sermon, Doctor of Ministry Intensive, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 14 August 2006).

⁷⁴ Acts 19:2b.

rehearse. After continued wrangling and attempts to exploit loopholes in the creed, in May of 381 A. D. one hundred and fifty bishops gathered in Constantinople to approve an expanded Nicene Creed with stronger statements concerning the Holy Spirit—a creed used, for the most part, across the world today.

For the most part; because in 589 A.D., Spanish Christians added a phrase to the Nicene Creed to address lingering local difficulties with Arianism.⁷⁵ The change wasn't discovered by Eastern Church leaders until 800 A.D.⁷⁶ Accusations of heresy abounded as church conflict escalated and eventually led to the division between the Greek-speaking Eastern Church and the Latin-speaking Western Church lasting to this day. It was perhaps simpler when the Jerusalem church could gather and decide about waiting on tables, but now the church is developing over vast spaces involving multitudes of cultures. Questions concerning control and authority become more complex. If the creed is the normative, rehearsed value statement for Christians everywhere, questions arise as to whether changes can be made to meet local needs, whether distant centers of authority such as Jerusalem, Rome, or Constantinople define core values for the church, or whether appeals may be made directly to Scripture, personal experience, and reason.

Lutheran Reformation: Value of God's Word Affirmed

How core values are maintained and who controls them are key questions that emerge during the 1500's as well. By this time the church had become well organized with established, perhaps entrenched, hierarchy. Not just a few malcontents, but many

⁷⁵ The words *and the Son* were added to read: "The Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*."

⁷⁶ *Book of Confessions*, 6.

discerning leaders entertained the thought of reform. In his *History of Lutheranism*, Eric W. Gritsch claims that

. . . sharp, realistic, sixteenth-century minds compared the origins of Christianity with the conditions of the church in their day and concluded that radical reforms were needed. Sensing their critique and using the traditional image of the church as a ship, one could make the judgment that, after a millennium and a half of sailing the dangerous waters of history, the institutional church had changed from an ark of costly discipleship to a ship of fools addicted to cheap grace.⁷⁷

The list of reformers from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century is impressive: Jon Huss in Prague, John Wycliffe in England, Dominican Jerome Savonarola in Italy, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Zwingli in Switzerland, and Calvin in Geneva. These and others entered the uncharted waters of reform, but Martin Luther merits primary attention here.

Luther trained under the strictest of orders, the German Augustinian Hermits. After studies proved fruitful, Luther was sent to the University of Wittenberg in the fall of 1508 as professor. Luther found himself in a position to appeal to Rome for the merger of two divergent chapters of the Augustinian Hermits—Reformed and Conventional.⁷⁸ Though advocating for compromise, he bowed to irreconcilable differences. In time, the central issue for Luther became the use of indulgences.⁷⁹ During 1515-1516, Luther had become convinced that the work of salvation was entirely God's work through Christ and was made possible through a right relationship with God, not through the works of

⁷⁷ Eric W. Gritsch, *History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁷⁹ Lyman Baker, "Study Guide for the 'Disposition of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences'", 1997, *Project Wittenberg*, <http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~lyman/english233/sg-95th.htm> (accessed March 21, 2004). The Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, required confession by all believers at least once a year to the priest. There were penalties as a consequence of sin. A remission of a portion or all of these penalties could be obtained, however, and these were called indulgences. Indulgences could be great donations of land to the church, great acts of service, or going on Crusades or pilgrimages to holy places. The indulgence system saw its rise in the eleventh century and never turned back—at least not until challenged by the Reformers.

humanity. Williston Walker, summarizing Luther's position claims, "... in his own personal experience the sum of the Gospel was the forgiveness of sins. It was 'good news,' filling the soul with peace, joy, and absolute trust in God. It was absolute dependence on the divine promises, on God's 'word.'"⁸⁰ For Luther this meant preaching against the abuse of indulgences, and other abuses, which caused him to pen the Ninety-five Theses that were posted on the door of Wittenberg's cathedral, October 31, 1517. Luther's conviction and action are indelibly marked by his religious core values, personal experience and dependence upon God's Word; God brings about salvation through Christ, not through indulgences.

Luther intended his theses to begin debate. And debate it did, leading quickly to the accusation of heresy by professor of theology Johann Maier of Eck. Luther hoped that once the Pope had a proper understanding of his views, the church would be allowed to return to its more fundamental beliefs.⁸¹ What Luther thought would bring the church to its right senses, turned out to be perceived as a direct attack on the authority and right of the church, which Luther charged with heresy.⁸² To give a sense of the response by Pope Leo X, the Papal Bull issued June 15, 1520, begins, "Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause. Listen to our prayers, for foxes have arisen seeking to destroy the vineyard whose winepress you alone have trod." Although Luther regarded himself as the protector of the

⁸⁰ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 304.

⁸¹ Ibid., 306.

⁸² Gritsch, *History of Lutheranism*, 15-16.

vineyard, the Pope referred to Luther as a “wild boar from the forest.”⁸³ It became clear to Luther that the Roman Church was not adhering to certain values that were essential for him to honor as true to God’s word. His in-depth exegetical study of Romans had empowered him for his work and, in fact, would do far more than he could imagine, especially for one future pastor in England.

Wesleyan Revival: Value of the Heart Experience

In England some two hundred years later a remarkably similar situation impelled revival rather than reformation. In Epworth, John Wesley is raised in the church by devout parents with father the parish Anglican priest. Historian of American Methodism, Frederick Norwood, sums up the dominant culture of the Church of England as the country entered into the Industrial Revolution: “The formal church had failed to reach many of the people. There was a field ripe for harvest inside the Anglican establishment, to say nothing of many others who, being dissenters or wholly outside any church stood in need of spiritual ministry.”⁸⁴ While the field for evangelism was fertile, Norwood deplores the will and the effectiveness of the church: “The mass of the people of England was in spiritual lethargy. Emotions of loyalty to Christ, of salvation through Him, of a present transforming faith had not been aroused.”⁸⁵ Wesley, however, was motivated to minister directly to the people. Not until 1784 did Wesley’s work for revival bear fruit in

⁸³ Pope Leo X, “Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther: Bull of Pope Leo X issued June 15, 1520,” *Papal Encyclicals Online*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo10/110exdom.htm> (accessed March 22, 2004).

⁸⁴ Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974), 54.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 455.

the development of a whole new church in America. But as early as October 31, 1755, in a letter to Church of England leader Rev. Thomas Adams, Wesley admits to straying from church rule, “we preach abroad, use extemporary prayer, form those who appear to be awakened into societies, and permit laymen, whom we believe God has called, to preach.”⁸⁶ Through the last issue, lay preaching, Wesley acutely surmises the condition of the church:

And upon the calmest view of things, we think, they who are only called of God, and not of man, have more right to preach, than they who are only called of man, and not of God. Now, that many of the Clergy, though called of man, are not called of God, have more right to preach, than they who are only called of man, and not of God. . . . Soul-damning Clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen!⁸⁷

The underlying concern for Wesley is the same as cited in chapter 2 for today’s church, that few established churches have saved any souls.

The march toward revival actually began a century earlier in 1678 with efforts to develop small religious societies to energize a more purposeful religious life intent on core values such as prayer, reading Scripture, frequent communion, aid to the poor and prisoner, and encouragement of preaching.⁸⁸ The list sounds much like Acts 2. By 1700, nearly one hundred of these societies were in place. And, in fact, Samuel Wesley, John’s father, formed one of these groups in Epworth in 1702. Not by accident was the Wesley lineage, going back to his grandfather, made up of “non conformist” pastors.⁸⁹ As the

⁸⁶ John Wesley’s letters, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., complete and unabridged (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 8:208.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

⁸⁸ Walker, *History*, 455

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 456.

more traditional clergy scorned these “enthusiasts,” the groups began to decline, but revival was in Wesley’s genes and blood.

In spite of his ancestry, Wesley’s value system was still substantially marked by the value system of the Church of England. Needing revival himself, he became aware of his own spiritual inadequacy on his trip to Georgia when both John and Charles Wesley encountered a group of Moravians.⁹⁰ While on the turbulent seas, John realized that even though he was a pastor, had formal training, pastoral experience, and had been a part of the church his entire life, he did not have the same depth of faith as his shipmates. Confused, he questioned for the first time the efficacy of his frame of reference, his faithful parents, the church in Epworth, and Oxford. Was that not sufficient? These safe strengths no longer sufficient to meet his needs, Wesley is poised for his transformational experience.

Months after his January 1738 return to England, overcome by internal conflict, Wesley sought out a Moravian enclave, a group meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. Wesley would write in his journal:

In the evening I went very unwilling to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.⁹¹

Because of John Wesley’s personal experience, D. Michael Henderson suggests,

“Conversion became the stock-in-trade of Methodism, its primary and fundamental

⁹⁰ Church of the Brethren, German pietists who lived in communal societies in Saxony, England and America, traced themselves back to Wycliffe and Huss before Luther’s reformation.

⁹¹ John Wesley’s journal entry, Wednesday, May 24, 1738, *Wesley’s Works*, 1:103.

method, upon which an elaborate instructional system would be built.”⁹² This is none other than a core value.

As if to witness the fruit of this experience, George Whitefield, Wesley’s fellow Oxonian, appealed to Wesley to join him in some “field preaching.” A step ahead of John Wesley and clearly ahead of his time, George Whitefield was “a man largely without denominational consciousness, in an age when such feelings were usually intense.”⁹³ Perhaps akin to Billy Graham of our own day, Whitefield was bold to go anywhere for any reason to preach the Gospel. Wesley hesitated, but the appeal to reach the unreachable so fit his personal core values that he could not resist.

This preaching without limits and boundaries may have developed into one of the most powerful values embedded into Methodism: lay leadership in the societies. The Fetter Lane Society, for instance, was open to people of any church membership (or lack thereof); such interdenominational groups were actually illegal in England at the time.⁹⁴ In The Fetter Lane Society duties of the group were broadly dispersed among the membership without heavy hierarchy. This democratic practice is clear evidence of the Moravian influence, as opposed to the Lutheran or Anglican communities that understood leadership to be the exclusive right of the clergy. The Moravians “spread the ministerial responsibility for worship, instruction, and service very broadly across the entire congregation. All members were expected to carry their part of the priestly role, and the

⁹² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 56.

⁹³ Walker, *History*, 457.

⁹⁴ Henderson, *Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 65.

entire community was mobilized in a ministerial corps.”⁹⁵ The larger group settings, however, required professionally trained leaders. This experience would heavily influence the direction of the Methodist Church on the frontiers of America. Itinerant pastors would share leadership with laity. This configuration served the church well, especially in a revolutionary land.⁹⁶

The seeds of Methodism also included relieving suffering and offering help where needed. In a society noted for its harshness, Methodists made regular contributions to those in need and visited the sick and imprisoned for the primary purpose of spiritual encouragement. The empowerment of laity opened the doors of ministry to all people, a ministry that until then had been firmly controlled by the clergy. Wesley’s opposition to the value system of his day both religiously and socially moved American revolutionists, who were increasingly governed by strong values of redemption, freedom, and caring for those in need, to catch the same spirit.

The Church and the World: Value Conflicts

In addition to conflicts arising from internal church issues, conflicts have also arisen from the church’s interaction with the world. Much like biblical times when Gentiles in increasing numbers responded to the Gospel message, world events have impinged upon the workings of the church and its self-understanding. Racism, poverty, cities in crisis, displacement of agricultural workers from the land, global warming, hunger, and many other social issues present themselves to the church. A prime

⁹⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁶ Wesley preaches on the effectiveness of itineracy in Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” *Wesley’s Works*, 7:208.

contemporary example is the momentary influx of people into the churches after the events of September 11, 2001. Almost every denomination and church responded in some way. Other examples focus on abortion or homosexuality as a central issue; for others, the lightning rod issue is the proliferation of gambling. But more often than not, the church remains silent. This silence begs for modern day prophetic leaders and churches to arise. In such a void, Desmond Tutu from South Africa speaks out of the varied and difficult experiences of Apartheid:

The first law of our being is that we are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and with the rest of God's creation. In Africa recognition of our interdependence is called *ubuntu* in Nguni languages It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. At the height of racial tension in South Africa, twenty thousand people attended the funeral of a white human rights activist named Molly Blackburn and over 90 percent of these were black, because Molly looked on you and saw a human being of infinite worth, because you had been created in the image of God.⁹⁷

Tutu clearly affirms the values of the church as different from the ways of the world.

The values of the church have been set by God.

Before World War II, in May 1934, eighteen Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches met from throughout Germany to "reiterate their common faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁹⁸ By their action and the Barmen Confession which they drafted they intended to oppose the imposition of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist agenda on their churches. Because they rebelled against government policy, their gathering and actions were seen as unpatriotic moves and even treasonous. Some of the leaders were sentenced

⁹⁷ Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004; Image Books, 2005), 25-27.

⁹⁸ *Book of Confessions*, 303.

to concentration camps.⁹⁹ In discussing the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Larry L. Rasmussen observes that the route of resistance was hardly considered by the masses, for there was “all but total lack of an articulated right to resistance in German theological ethics . . . [rather] unqualified obedience to authority was taught as an unquestioned virtue in the religious instruction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”¹⁰⁰ In spite of the courage required and the dangers faced, it is important not to overly romanticize the work of reformers. Later on Karl Barth, principal author of the Barmen Confession, admitted that he had “failed to make the Jewish Question a decisive issue at that time.”¹⁰¹

Summary

Examination of key biblical references and history in relation to values reveals the reoccurrence of prominent aspects of core values: the need for personal transformative experience (often in the face of dramatic social or personal change), reliance on God’s Word, the need constantly to rehearse core values and reform them if necessary, and the need for responsible, Spirit-led leaders. However evidence of sustainability of these values is rather disturbing. Only momentarily do flashes of value victories promote God’s cause. With such temporary effectiveness and so many struggles internally and externally, even a value-based church may struggle to reflect fully God’s values. Biblical

⁹⁹ For assessments of the Barmen Confession see John T. Pawlikowski “The Holocaust: Failure in Christian Leadership,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Multimedia Learning Center Online*, <http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/resources/books/genocide/chapo8.html> (accessed March 22, 2004), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, 2d ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 200.

¹⁰¹ Pawlikowski, “Failure in Christian Leadership,” 10.

and historical record reveals what God values; theology allows human reflection on those values.

Theological Connection Between Scripture and History

Theology, the understanding of who God is and how God relates to creation, is the value-laden undercurrent that informs interpretation of Scripture and all life. Because any part of theology can dominate and energize a local church in its value structure, research on core values is both difficult and elusive. For example, the doctrine of salvation lies at the foundation of a “soul-winning” church. The doctrine of sanctification lies at the heart of a church related to the holiness movement. A strong understanding of sacraments and worship may underpin a liturgical church. The same may be said of eschatology for a church emphasizing prophecy, or service for a church centered on outreach. Certain elements of theology may be emphasized over others.

The question then arises concerning how a particular aspect in theological study lends itself to a discussion of church values and the appointment process. We will sample the conclusions of theologians to discover whether the doctrine of the church provides the lens through which to deepen an understanding of church core values.

The Doctrine of the Church

Thomas and Wondra provide an access point outlining the history and scope of positions concerning the doctrine of the church. They use Lesslie Newbigin’s outline of four essential biblical understandings of the church—as congregation of the faithful, as

the body of Christ, as the fellowship of the Spirit, and as the community of hope.¹⁰²

Perhaps the most widely held views are the first two. The faithful community is the gathering of those who have received the good news of Jesus Christ and have given their lives over to him. The body of Christ goes deeper, for it provides a significant metaphor. The body of Christ, the church, is the community in which the Spirit of Christ dwells. The Spirit, who has given each member a different gift, knits the members together in “Christ’s body.” Similarly, the members work together like the body does, not simply as different parts, but joined together by the skeletal and vascular systems. The members are joined together as a body by the sacraments. The sacrament of baptism demonstrates this doctrine: as the self dies, a new creation rises. After this new birth, communion sustains the body. This sacramental quality of the body of Christ as the church runs throughout church history. The sacraments cannot be separated from the church.

Other than the faithful community and body of Christ imagery, two other major approaches to church can be seen. The fellowship of the Spirit is vital. Had it not been for the formative events of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, the church would not exist in its current form. If the influence of the Holy Spirit were removed from the book of Acts, a drastically different church would have survived to today, if at all.

The community of hope describes the church as proleptic, that is, a community rehearsing God’s end-time kingdom graciously poured into the present by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. This eschatological community strives to live out God’s purpose. The key word here is *strives* as the church perseveres against a “stiff-necked world,” to borrow an Old Testament phrase. The community of hope courageously and

¹⁰² Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 258-260. See also Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 2002). Dulles uses the following categories for the church: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and disciple.

enthusiastically works because of the pre-emptive victory of Christ in his ministry, death, and resurrection. This understanding will figure prominently in the personal value statement in chapter 6.

Another way to understand the church is as either visible or invisible. These two primary expressions of the church correspond to a common definition of sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. According to Thomas and Wondra, over the centuries these two emphases,

have appeared in reaction to each other. The first is the tendency to define the church in a legal way, in terms of outward and visible factors such as subscription to a creed or submission to a bishop. The second is the tendency to define the church in inward, invisible, or spiritual terms such as faith, election, regeneration, purity of life, and the presence of the Spirit.¹⁰³

Even casual conversations with people who may or may not be active in the church may reflect this concept. For instance, people declare with conviction, “True Christians cannot be measured by membership in the church.” These words capture a sense of a visible and invisible church.¹⁰⁴ Words and phrases like “fully devoted followers,” “seekers,” “mature,” “growing,” or “infant” describe where people are on their spiritual journey. Whether persons at all stages of development are part of the church is subject to disagreement. When values are interjected into the mix of audiences conflicts often brew. Whether a church intentionally changes its forms to draw in those who are seekers, or whether the church is the body of believers holding up valued traditions that newcomers,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 261-262.

¹⁰⁴ Shirley C. Guthrie summarizes the doctrine of the church, visible and invisible, from a Reformed perspective in *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), chapter 18.

catechumens, must learn to conform to is a contentious question. Debates such as these echo throughout countless worship committees and church boards across the country.

Others describe the church according to periods or how it relates to the world. In the twentieth century the church has moved through three periods, according to Colin Williams: a period of high church rediscovery involving a search for a common doctrine for the church. A second period suspected first movement of the century of being too introspective and added a strong mission orientation. Finally the last period of the century, supposedly lasting to today, sees the church as God's instrument as servant to the world.¹⁰⁵ As Thomas and Wondra point out, "The church is that part of the world in which God's love, lordship and purpose of salvation are recognized, responded to, and celebrated,"¹⁰⁶ however, many views of the church presume a Christendom model. Paul Knitter, for example, in *Theologies of Religions* surveys the various ways of dealing with the growing complexities of society and the ways that the church relates to the populations of the world. Knitter sees churches operating from four basic models: replacement, fulfillment, mutuality, or acceptance¹⁰⁷ where the church transforms and replaces all other religions as the one true religion, fulfills all spiritual quests, mutually works alongside and dialogues with other religions, or accepts the fact that there are many true religions. This survey indicates the wideness and complexity of theological reflection in the area of the doctrine of the church.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 262.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

Jesus' words in John 17, however, were very simple. His prayer calls the church to unity so that the world may believe. The relationship between the believer to Jesus and the believer to other believers is "like unto that of the Son to the Father." Jesus instructs the disciples about this community of love and forgiveness in the resurrection (John 20:23). It is this same unity Gilbert Bilezikian compares to the community found in the Trinity. Bilezikian challenges the church when he writes: "Instead of the world being challenged and transformed by the newness of God-like community, it is the church that conforms to the anti-community patterns of the world."¹⁰⁸ Bilezikian calls John 17 "the only model" for the church—Godly community, based on mutuality, love, and reciprocal servanthood in Christ.

Bonhoeffer: The Value of Service

A generation earlier, as a result of life and world experiences related to World War II, Bonhoeffer shifts his understanding of the church, utilizing a servanthood model. In *Cost of Discipleship*, the early Bonhoeffer catalogs his understanding of the church. Sacraments figure prominently.

Baptism incorporates us into the unity of the Body of Christ, and the Lord's Supper fosters and sustains our fellowship and communion in that Body. Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ. [Furthermore,] the Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church (I Cor. 12:12) To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the church, a member of the Body of Christ (Gal 3:28; I Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church Christ's place on earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The Church is the real presence of Christ.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 50.

¹⁰⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. and unabridged ed., trans. Christian Kaiser Verlag (New York: Macmillan, SCM Press, 1959), 215-216.

The visible community includes preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, the varying ministries and offices, and fellowship.¹¹⁰

For Bonhoeffer the invisible church on earth is made up of the Saints, the holy community.¹¹¹ This holy community is the result of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. According to Bonhoeffer, “The separation of the Church and the world from one another is the crusade which the Church fights for the sanctuary of God on earth.”¹¹² Ultimately the aim of the Christian life is to do the good works for which God created each person, though to the believer the only good work is the work of God in Christ Jesus. Bonhoeffer summarizes his theology thus: “The whole purpose of our new creation in Christ is that in him we might attain unto good works.”¹¹³

But Bonhoeffer raises different issues in his *Letters and Papers From Prison* under the pressure of Nazi imprisonment:

. . . if therefore man becomes radically religionless—and I think that that is already more or less the case (else how is it, for example, that this war, in contrast to all previous ones, is not calling forth any ‘religious’ reaction?)—what does that mean for ‘Christianity’? It means that the foundation is taken away from the whole of what has up to now been our “Christianity.” . . . [A]re we to fall upon a few unfortunate people in their hour of need and exercise a sort of religious compulsion on them? If religion is only a garment of Christianity—and even this garment has looked very different at different times—then what is a religionless Christianity? The questions to be answered would surely be: What do a

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 224-230.

¹¹¹ Ibid., see discussion in chapter 31.

¹¹² Ibid., 253.

¹¹³ Ibid., 267.

church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world?¹¹⁴

Bonhoeffer's experiences in prison made him reflect on the *Cost of Discipleship*. In one of many letters to his dear friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer finally admits a new understanding of the work of the Saints, or the invisible church:

I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote. I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that is it only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith.¹¹⁵

Rasmussen notes the “decisive difference: The drawing out of the Lordship of Christ over the world and the *Gestalt Christi* within the world. [Bonhoeffer's understanding] was broadened from “Christ existing as the fellowship of men in the Church” to “Christ existing as the whole human community.”¹¹⁶ Consequently, Bonhoeffer outlined a book in prison with these new thoughts in which he concludes: “The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others”¹¹⁷ It appears that the distinction between a visible and invisible church has disappeared. As Bonhoeffer shifts his core values as a result of a

¹¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, new greatly enlarged ed., trans. Christian Kaiser Verlag (New York: Macmillan, SCM Press, 1971; First Macmillan Paperbacks ed., 1972), 280.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 369.

¹¹⁶ Rasmussen, *Bonhoeffer*, 90.

¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Paper*, 380-383.

transformative experience, we gain an urgent sense that the mission and purpose of the church is inextricably tied to the needs of the world.

Maddox on Wesley: The Value of Grace

Chapter 2 raised the concern that the United Methodist Church has lost its understanding of mission and purpose especially as it is played out in the itineracy of pastors. Randy Maddox may offer a key, “Wesley’s descendents rather quickly dismissed him as a model for the practice of theological activity, and this dismissal widely led to the loss of the distinctive tension of his concern for responsible grace.”¹¹⁸ If Methodism has lost its theological distinction, namely *responsible grace*, as Maddox defines it, the church has lost its hallmark, lost its rudder. As a rudderless ship, Methodism becomes a hollow hull devoid of cargo to the needy world. Maddox is quick to add, “the one thing that [Wesleyan theological activity] certainly would *not* mean is simple collation and repetition of Wesley’s theological pronouncements as a scholastic authority. Rather it would mean—at the very least—to bring theological activity into the service of nurturing contemporary Christian life and witness, just as he did.”¹¹⁹ By bringing an active understanding of grace, responsible grace, into the work of today’s church, the needs of the world encounter a force more powerful than anything the world offers, a force defining the early stages of Methodism.

In a series of lectures presented at the North Indiana Conference session in 2006, Maddox addressed the need for applying this grace to one’s life. In these lectures

¹¹⁸ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Maddox points to several overarching aspects of Wesley's grace: that Wesley demonstrated a growing emphasis on grace as healing power,¹²⁰ not just of pardon; that grace is God's very presence, not just a present; that as loving presence God's grace respects and upholds our integrity as well as understands and honors our particularity.¹²¹ This focus on the distinctiveness of grace may be the element that made Methodism so dynamic and attractive to the early Americans. It may also be what can make Wesleyan theology attractive again in a diverse and divided world. If so, this grace must be lived through the lives of the people. This grace must become a central core value for the community. If so, it may well be the only unifier strong and expansive enough to achieve that goal. Maddox outlines the effective power of this grace through "Wesley's broadening vision of salvation": not just for the few, but available to all; not just by rational assent, but by affectional conviction; not just forgiveness, but spiritual transformation; not just for individuals, but for society; not just for souls, but for physical bodies; and not just for humans, but for the whole of creation.¹²² This application of grace would meet the needs of and be welcomed by those outside the church in a world dominated by divisive, destructive issues and values. In Wesley's own words:

¹²⁰ A classical understanding of sin-repentance-salvation may not satisfy every deep wound. One facet of grace brings about healing that Maddox alludes to and Andrew Sung Park fully explores in *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004). Similarly Robert H. Schuller, in an extemporaneous lecture on 9 March 2006 at the Schuller School for Preaching candidly addressed the nature of "positive Christianity" and its understanding of sin. He, too, suggested that classical Christianity has narrowly reduced God's work to a formula that may not encompass the broad healing work of God.

¹²¹ Randy L. Maddox, "The Healing Love of God: Wesley's Mature Understanding of Grace," (lecture at North Indiana Conference, United Methodist Church, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 1 June 2006).

¹²² Randy L. Maddox, "God's Mercy over ALL God's Creatures: Wesley's Broadening Vision of Salvation," (lecture at North Indiana Conference, United Methodist Church, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 1 June 2006).

In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne, namely love of God and [other humans]. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers [fruit of the spirit]: long-suffering, etc. In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of others. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety: reading and hearing the word; public, family, private prayer; receiving the Lord's Supper; fast and abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in body, the church.¹²³

And again, Wesley continues: "Wherever [salvation] is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. First, by doing no harm Secondly, by doing good Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer" ¹²⁴ The emphasis on outward works forms the inner circles of concern for Wesley, while the works of piety fall to the outer circles. This hierarchy of core values is entirely consistent with the prophetic messages and those of Jesus. Whereas the emphasis across history has often declined to an orthopraxy limited to works within the church, renewal and revival, both biblically and historically, have led to greater interaction with the world, in the world.

Summary

God clearly demonstrates incarnationally the need to interact with the world. Since Christ was visible, the church must be also.¹²⁵ The church must be fully in culture, maintaining a core value system that will challenge the world, even if such action elicits

¹²³ John Wesley, Sermon 92, "On Zeal," *Wesley's Works*, 7:60.

¹²⁴ *2004 Book of Discipline*, General Rules, ¶103.

¹²⁵ Consider also H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

pain. Jesus, after all, warns of possible persecution. The challenge, then, is not to hold the church to the highest levels of judgment over the world, a commonly assumed and perceived mission. As Jesus has already demonstrated in his ministry and resurrection, the real challenge is to hold the church to the highest levels of grace and love.

All of chapters 2 and 3 point to the challenges: the temptation to succumb to worldly values, and the alternative temptation to cloister. In Christ is the model for holding onto divine values in human form while engaging the world in love and grace. The model is the same for the church.

The biblical struggles of Joshua, Josiah, and Paul, the needs for reformation and revival addressed by Luther and Wesley, and the growing sentiment of modern day church leaders, summarized in chapter 2, claim that the church often succumbs to the powers of the world. But if churches merely mirror the cultures they inhabit, they lose the powerful message of hope and healing. Samuel DeWitt Proctor beautifully summarizes the condition of the American culture, “Rather than transcend the taboos of the secular society, the churches, both black and white, simply reflected things as they were.”¹²⁶

Because of the proclivity of churches to recidivate, the church must regularly revisit its values. The dilemma is great for the pastor who wants to devote time to the ministry of the word, but finds “waiting on table” more to the liking of the membership of the church or the constraint to pay off a seminary debt a higher personal goal than mission. Thus the pastor and church can continue as usual, failing to rekindle the power of core values, or they may step out in faith and honestly look at themselves.

¹²⁶ Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1995), 24.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Having explored personal experiences, the state of the art of church core values and the state of the appointment system, and having reviewed pertinent biblical, historical, and theological foundations, the needs of the context must be addressed. The contextual need in this project hinges upon one key question: “What are the core values of Evangel Heights United Methodist Church?” Procedurally, however, a second question immediately presents itself, “*How* will we discover these core values?” This chapter describes the methodology used to answer these questions and events preceding the actual study.

Additional Contextual Research

Preliminary to the research project the congregation participated in two complementary projects. First, from August to October 2005, pastor and congregation engaged in a series of house meetings providing the newly-appointed pastor opportunity to meet with nearly half of the church membership. Besides introductions, these meetings allowed members of the church to dream about additions and changes to the church’s ministry and facilities. Nearly 140 people who participated were asked three simple questions: What attracted you to Evangel Heights? What would make Evangel Heights an exceedingly great church? And, what are you able to do to help make this possible?

These meetings helped build excitement about the future. Called the Vision 2020 meetings, these gatherings, in effect, served as focus groups. Valuable information concerning core values was collected in those meetings. Unfortunately, the Vision 2020 meetings did not attain the same rigor of accountability, observation, transcription, and coding as the formal doctoral project. Nonetheless, the summary of the Vision 2020 materials have been included in the appendix (see appendix A) and contribute to the overall impact of the larger project.

From October 2005 to May 2006, a second series of meetings, conducted by the leader of the worship committee and involving the pastor, took place concurrently with the implementation of the Doctor of Ministry project. These meetings sought to give a clear understanding of worship at Evangel Heights. Called the “worship roundtable,” a group of eight hand-picked individuals reflecting various known positions about worship met for a period of eight months. The group lost some momentum toward the end of their study but came up with several observations with at least one goal being achieved, a deeper respect for each other’s perspectives. They wrote their own curriculum to allow other groups in the church to follow a refined version of the worship roundtable experience. Understanding that this church was going through these two experiences, in addition to the formal project, allows the reader to appreciate both the excitement and intensity of work this church experienced during the first year of the pastor’s appointment.

The Form of Analysis

The first step in the Doctor of Ministry project was to determine the general nature of the work, including whether to measure change or effectiveness, determine the matters that needed to be quantified, or increase understanding. With a desire to know *what* the core values of the church actually were (as close as could reasonably be determined) and *how* to determine those values so as to include them in a church profile, the contextual team decided on an essentially qualitative process, contrary to how many congregations discover their value systems. Some of the methods utilized by Christianity Today and Aubrey Malphurs are explained in chapter 2. Many congregational-styled churches use surveys with Likert scales to help inform a search committee of a congregation's needs while calling a new pastor. Peers, contextual and professional associates, and a research consultant¹ overwhelmingly concluded that an overall qualitative process, however, would be most beneficial, given the intangible nature of values. All further concluded that the approach should be descriptive. The research project would describe the dynamic process by which Evangel Heights discovered its core values to expand the church profile.

Through Candidacy Review and further work with the consultant, a variety of techniques were decided upon: two approaches to focus groups responding to Sunday messages and experiences of other churches, a questionnaire, and, a survey. These techniques provided a three-pronged approach to compare, contrast, and assemble responses.

¹ Dr. Jackie Baston, Exceptional Education Teacher Trainer/Resource Teacher, Kansas City Missouri School District, Kansas City, MO.

The Qualitative Approach

Within qualitative analysis, numerous approaches are possible. Each is supported by a theoretical basis that determines the analytical approach to be taken. Two theories lend themselves to this particular qualitative study, grounded theory and value theory. Though value theory actually originates from quantitative study, this hybrid, used qualitatively, satisfies the needs of the two questions: what are the core values and how can we discover them.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, originally developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, has traditionally allowed for participation by professional and lay audiences. This flexibility serves well for replicating the process of this study in other churches. Quite simply, the results of this work are *grounded* in various sources of data. Not intended for mathematical analysis as in quantitative work, the collected data is intended for creative and systematic handling to build, not test, a theory. This is the principle

Table 3
Use of Grounded Theory Terminology

Coding: A researcher's understanding, interpreting, and labeling of data

Open Coding: process by which concepts and categories of ideas are identified

In vivo: using actual words of respondents to label a concept

Saturation: The point at which no new understanding may be added to a concept

Axial Coding: process by which concepts relate to each other.

tenant of grounded theory. And in this particular case, the goal has been not so much to build theory, as to build a corpus of unique core values. Thus, identified values emerge from, are grounded in, data consisting of contemporary words, ideas, symbols, insights, stories and responses to sermons, as well as biblical, historical and theological materials. In other words, the core values emerge from and are *grounded* in the conversations, discussions, and foundational research of the project. Grounded theory characteristics include the ability to critically analyze the study environment, recognize the tendency toward bias, be flexible and open to criticism, and be sensitive to the words of the respondents.² Therefore, regardless the source of data, key concepts and themes are reviewed in such a way as to reveal patterns, similarities, and inconsistencies, until a point of *saturation* is reached. Saturation, in this case, means a consistent encountering of certain concepts which often reveal a core value. Strauss and Corbin define saturation as the point “when no new information seems to emerge”³ Grounded theory provides the process by which to sift all relevant materials of this project from ancient record to modern response, and ultimately determine where Evangel Heights is at a particular point in its history in its value structure.

More precisely, Strauss and Corbin indicate that grounded theory has to do with “constructing from data an explanatory scheme that systematically integrates various concepts through statements of relationship.”⁴ This understanding is entirely consistent with the techniques of grounded theory in the Evangel Heights setting. But an additional

² Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded theory*, 2d ed. (Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

definition of theory further clarifies the use of grounded theory for this project:

“[Grounded theory] enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action.”⁵ This explanation more closely resembles the current work, for a realistic discovery of values does “explain” and “predict events” and, indeed, provides “guides to action,” even though most of the “predicting” and “guiding” falls outside of the purview of the project. Chapter 6 will reveal future studies that a discovery of core values could impact. But this research is replete with illustrations of “explaining” where Evangel Heights is in its understanding of core values. Furthermore, this approach assumes “that all of the concepts pertaining to a given phenomenon have not yet been identified, at least not in this population or place.”⁶ For Evangel Heights this is certainly true—the core values have not yet been fully identified. And whatever understanding of core values exists need amplification and deeper reflection by the church. It may be that the core values are lived out by some sense of osmosis, but not all of the values are readily articulated, publicly identified, or discussed. In these ways the congregation is building theory.

Coding

The centerpiece of grounded theory and much of qualitative analysis, for that matter, is the coding process. To use a metaphor from personal experience, the coding process is like working on a puzzle. If all the pieces of data are compared to pieces of a thousand-piece puzzle, coding becomes the process of putting the puzzle together. But

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

sorting pieces by similar appearance and function is the first step. Into separate piles go the pieces that look like sky, the pieces that look like trees, the pieces that look like ground, and all the pieces with straight, flat edges. Sub-categories may even be necessary before matching pieces into identifiable units. This process is like the escalating coding process, first separating pieces of data into like concepts, then combining like concepts to reveal a picture.

Forms of Coding

Open coding is like the initial process of dumping the puzzle pieces onto a table and beginning the sorting. Through identifying and sorting concepts into general categories, open coding enables the researcher to ascertain what the respondents are talking about in questionnaires or focus groups. When specific concepts are espoused by the participants, open coding permits comparison, contrast and labeling concepts through both cursory and detailed reading of transcripts and other forms of data. The issue is not the frequency that something is said, but rather, the process of comparing and contrasting.

Labels for groups of expressions are critical. Missions, for instance, could be a code, but a precise definition is problematic. It may mean one thing in a particular biblical story, another in a specific historical setting, and possibly a hundred meanings to members in a congregation. Coding, however, allows related concepts to converse creatively with one other. Coding may include well-established words like “missions” or they may be *in vivo* codes, that is, words that the respondents themselves use in a focus groups or interview like, “open arms” to mean hospitality.

This project constantly encounters a danger acknowledged by Strauss and Corbin, “. . . [T]he use of established concepts . . . ‘Borrowed’ concepts or names for phenomena often bring with them commonly held meanings and associations”⁷ Although a concept may be well known, it may not denote a common understanding. For example, missions can be coded biblically, historically, theologically, contextually, and comparatively to other modern day contexts and resources. In the coding process a “dimensional continuum”⁸ can be created that not only covers time and space, but also character. Missions may take on the characteristics of such disparate understandings as local, regional, world, personal, group, work camps, etc. Coding, therefore, can be demanding as well as creative.

The open coding process requires diligence in following Aubrey Malphurs’ warning to make a distinction between actual core values and aspirations. In such an endeavor respondents’ story-telling often reveals more truth than their idealized understanding of concepts. Although a fair amount of aspiration, perception, and even misperception appears, the open coding practiced seeks as close a picture of reality as possible, not an idealized image of the church that would make Evangel Heights indistinguishable from most other mainline churches. This process seeks to identify, not change or alter existing values; that will no doubt be follow-up work for years to come.

The final step in the coding process is creating a complete picture. Since many piles of pieces does not make a picture, the pieces must be put together in a meaningful way. Axial coding takes open coding one step farther to identifying properties of coded concepts, and seeing relationships between the properties and concepts. In other words,

⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸ Ibid., 118.

the next step is to form an axis around which concepts and properties of concepts rotate. Creswell describes this stage as the point at which the researcher builds “a ‘story’ that connects the categories.”⁹

Unlike a jigsaw puzzle with a picture on the box, grounded theory provides no guide for the outcome. Instead, sorting and assembling must continue until findings and categories can be identified. Although some people like putting puzzles together without a picture, and some even attempt to assemble puzzles upside down, guided only by the shape of the piece, most prefer a clear guide. If the process of this study is to be replicated by other churches, most church leaders will need to have more framework to feel confident in doing similar work. Since values are intangible, a model or framework may be essential to make the coding process more concrete without losing the flexibility of grounded theory. Interestingly, axial coding gives us the clue. Sharing the same root word, another theory, axiology, the study of values, or value theory, offers a translucent framework.

Value Theory

“Translucent” suggests a framework that is not overpowering but gives just enough structure to assist a church to move away from generic value statements to unique identity. To avoid a nondescript statement like thousands gathering dust in church file cabinets across the nation, and to avoid developing mere consensus about group likes or dislikes, *value theory* complements and defines the coding process by providing an additional filter to understand the depth and meaning of the various responses. Some

⁹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998), 150.

pastor may already be familiar with value theory through a personal exploration of personal values through the Hartman Profile and other instruments.

The Hartman Profile, a value-testing instrument used by many corporations throughout the world, opened a new perspective on identifying values. Value theory, ironically a quantitative methodology, provides helpful illustrations for understanding core values. An illustration made popular by Robert Hartman, referring to G. E. Moore, one of the earlier leaders in value theory, explains value theory:

Let's say that I have my automobile standing out there in the parking lot and I forgot my key there and I say to one of you, "Pray be kind enough and go outside and get me the key out of the car." And you say, "What car is it?" and I say, "Oh, it's a good car." Will you ever find it? You won't. "Good" is not a natural property. When I say, "It is a good car," I have not described the car. You do not know whether it's a Ford, Oldsmobile, Chevy, how many doors . . . you know nothing of the car. You don't know the natural properties. Yet, you do know a great deal about the car, you know it's a good car. What does that mean? It does have tires; it does have a motor; it does have a door; and when you push the accelerator it will accelerate; when you push the brake, it will brake . . . and yet you know nothing of the car itself. We put [descriptive properties] in a relationship to [value property] and we said, "A thing is good if it has all its descriptive properties." This is the fundamental definition of value or formal axiology.¹⁰

This process can be used for a chair (descriptive qualities being a knee-high, supported structure with a seat and back—a back, for without it, the list becomes descriptive of a stool). This explanation helps discriminate among the types of concepts this study deals with, since "church," "mission," "worship," and others can present an enormous tangle of responses.

Three particular words in value theory shape the translucent framework incorporating grounded theory into the coding process used in this study. Borrowed from

¹⁰ Robert J. Hartman, "The Measurement of Value." *Hartman Institute*, <http://www.hartmaninstitute.org/html/MeasurementofValue.htm> (accessed May 11, 2006).

Hartman in his application of value theory, the three words, *systemic*, *extrinsic*, and *intrinsic values* are woven into grounded theory procedures. Simple definitions of the components appear in table 4.

Table 4
Value Theory Concepts

Value Theory: Concerns itself with the worth of people, concepts or things to identify classifications.

Systemic Values: The most basic and abstract statement about a concept

Extrinsic Values: The properties or construct of a systemic value

Intrinsic Values: The unique, singular, or personal about the value.

Systemic values are grand, sweeping observations that can be made of anything. They are constructs that “give rise to only two values, either perfection or non-existence. There are no degrees such as good, bad, indifferent, and so on.”¹¹ They tend to be concepts that we have, at least, a general conception. For example, most people can conceptualize a chair, even if everyone’s chair might look different, but that is extrinsic value. Systemic value speaks to the simplest, most definable concept: chair or not-chair, car or not-car, church or not-church, mission or not-mission.

Extrinsic values focus on the characteristics that create a system, the common characteristics of a chair or of mission. Because certain properties, or a “denumerable set,” make up each abstract or systemic value, extrinsic values reveal “[w]hen an abstract

¹¹ Ibid.

concept is fulfilled or not fulfilled.”¹² Extrinsic values invite reflection on the goodness or badness of a particular concept. Whether there are four identifiable properties to a concept or four hundred, each property may have one or many sub-properties and valuations attached to them. For example, one of the properties of a chair is its legs another is its comfort. One may like a chair exceedingly well for its comfort of the seat (one property), but not like the chair because of the shape of the legs (another property). Thus, overall the value of the chair is not good, but just fair.

Intrinsic values are the most important addition to understanding how to discover core values. Intrinsic valuation permits moving beyond concepts and properties, merely the sum of parts, to uncovering dearly-cherished, deeply felt core values. The use of a chair to discuss values calls to mind a television series in the late 1970’s called *All in the Family*. In it, bigoted Archie Bunker occupied a favorite chair. Everyone who watched the show knew it was a chair (systemic), and that it had certain characteristics, such as being dilapidated, old and stained (extrinsic), which would motivate most people to deposit the chair at the end of a driveway for the trash. But Archie Bunker placed a good value upon the chair; this was *his chair* (intrinsic). Archie Bunker had moved well beyond a systemic understanding of “chair” to *identify* that chair with himself. This chair was *unique*. If something is “mine,” (singular or intrinsic), it is no longer “abstract” (systemic) or “construct” (extrinsic).¹³

To figure out how Evangel Heights uncovers its core values, moving beyond the abstract (systemic thinking) is necessary. According to the bishop and district superintendents of the North Indiana Conference (cabinet) in a personal meeting with

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

them, one of the great difficulties with core values is that many church value statements sound alike even though the cabinet knows the churches and their values are not. During part of this meeting with the cabinet the general tone of conversation could be summed up like this: “All churches tell us they want to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (systemic thinking). “All churches tell us they want a pastor to preach the Gospel” (a small step in the direction of extrinsic thinking). A conclusion can be reached from this observation that few churches reach the decisive intrinsic level of thinking that truly moves them forward and allows them to understand their unique, singular call upon life or community with the Gospel message.

A question to face is whether the work outlined in this chapter will lead to another glorious, idealistic systemic understanding of congregational identity or whether Evangel Heights will honestly look at its “chair,” warts and all. This is a dilemma for Evangel Heights and any other church that might begin a search for its core values. Intrinsic valuation, whether right or wrong, good or bad, gets closer to reality than either extrinsic or systemic. Value theory becomes really exciting at this level of probing, as Robert Hartman intimates in the following:

When I define myself systemically, I put up a system, I construct something as myself which I'm not at all And you probably know some people in your acquaintance whose images of themselves are very different from everybody else's images of them. They live a construct Also, a person can define himself extrinsically [L]ike now I am a speaker, then I'll be a listener, then an eater, and so on. I am a father, I am a commuter, I am a Rotarian But do these situations add up to myself? Any extrinsic definition of myself is really not the definition of myself. In order to make the definition of myself I must neither construct myself nor even abstract from myself, but simply BE, namely, identify myself And this is the most difficult and most important task of our mortal life. It is very difficult simply to be.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid.

And that is what a value is; it exposes one's "being." Once an individual or a group reaches that point, they can entertain change, but that is for further study. Hartman further illustrates the concept of "being" using Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, a local judge in Russia whose ambition was to become a member of the Supreme Court in Moscow. He achieves his dream, but because of an accident and his impending death, his fine, powerful friends fall away from him, save a poor, miserable servant, who makes him comfortable in dying. Ivan Ilych becomes the most intrinsic, the most authentic on his deathbed.¹⁵ But one need not wait until their deathbed. Eminent psychotherapist Carl R. Rogers writes of the individual's tendency to "actualize himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend . . . to expand, extend, develop, mature"¹⁶ Dr. Sandra Herron calls it the development of essence. She points out that humans move from conception through childhood and adulthood to maturity, but few reach the most authentic, intrinsic state of being, "transcendence."¹⁷ Dr. George Soper, who helps students and employers interpret the Hartman Profile, calls attention to our society becoming increasingly systemic in our understanding. "We increasingly see ourselves as cogs in a wheel. We are losing our individuality."¹⁸

¹⁵ Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych," trans. Constance Garnett, in *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, consulting ed. dir. George Stade (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004), 135-144.

¹⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 351.

¹⁷ Sandra W. Herron, (lecture, Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA, 7 March 2005).

¹⁸ George E. Soper, interview by author, South Bend, IN, 9 May, 2006. Soper is a certified interpreter of the Hartman Profile.

Summary of Theoretical Approach

All of these observations can apply to the church. Many churches see themselves primarily fulfilling some nebulous role or denominational function and at the same time losing all sense of direction or purpose. However, if churches can attain the level of intrinsic valuation, which successful churches (not necessarily equated with mega-churches) probably attain, a church can identify core values, choose pastoral leadership, and live out God's unique calling. Borrowing these three words from value theory—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic—adds deep understanding to grounded theory work.

To measure values, Hartman developed a mathematical system. Even though this study does not measure participants perceived intensity of “goodness” or “badness” of values, that measurement might be the desirable next step for some churches. Such measurement may provide a mechanism to change values inconsistent with biblical, historical, and theological values or to expand and enhance the properties of such values. This step was not part of the original construct of this work, though another researcher may choose to use more of Hartman's techniques. This study, instead, uses his tripartite description of values to form a lens through which to gain a deeper understanding of core values in the grounded theory coding process.

The Preaching Component

After establishing the theoretical basis, implementation is the next step. Certain givens in this study need to be addressed, such as the required preaching series in this collaborative program between United Theological Seminary and the Schuller School for Preaching. The Schuller School for Preaching organizes its curriculum around four main

principles: *Method*, *Messenger*, *Milieu*, and *Message*. Table 5 defines the principle topic of each week-long class.

Table 5
Components of the Schuller School for Preaching

The Method: The pastor's use of communication tools and resources.

The Messenger: The pastor's impact upon the audience.

The Milieu: The pastor's understanding of setting and context.

The Message: The pastor's ability to interpret and communicate God's Word.

The Method addresses essential techniques in effective communication. During an introductory session of The Method in 2000, Robert H. Schuller suggested five roles of ministry for the communicator of the Gospel: teacher, indoctrinator, proclaimer, social justice articulator and witness.¹⁹ These titles hint at similar roles for the church, recorded in chapter 3. Schuller pointed out at this session that a personal mission statement directs the overarching work of the pastor as communicator. To that end, this pastor has since operated out of a personal core value: "Delivering a message of hope." Sandra Herron shared other elements of The Method during the 2005 advanced course that included coaching in the areas of story telling and use of variation in pitch, prosody, and pacing with the primary focus on the benefit to the listener. The listener must benefit to relate intellectually, spiritually, or emotionally to the message. Dr. Paul Bordon, using Thomas G. Long's *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, stressed that preachers should

¹⁹ Robert H. Schuller, "The Method" (lecture, Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA, 14 November 2000).

not only ask the historical-critical questions of Scripture in preparation for preaching, but also rhetorical questions related to the genre of the text, including the function of the genre and the literary devices used to achieve one basic end—"to determine the meaning of the text, interpret the text consistently with the writer's intent and the modern listener's situation, and then apply the meaning."²⁰ Thus the preacher who engages the Scripture at the level of understanding the genre and the motivation can expose the power of Scripture by using universal and timeless tools of suspense, surprise, and discovery.²¹ Therefore, looking at the literary devices used in a particular biblical story, such as dialogue, narration, plot, tone, dénouement, allows the preacher and listener to connect emotionally with a story and its truth.²² These components of The Method are invaluable to the development of the preached series, and are particularly vital to reveal the values contained in Scripture.

The Messenger centers on the communicator's strengths, weaknesses, character, and call. This portion of the course of study is particularly identified with personal values. One cannot call a church to discover core values without the leader going through a similar process. Lawrence Wilkes suggests, "The message and the messenger are so intertwined that it becomes impossible at times to separate the two."²³ Similarly, Christ, being fully God and fully man, helps us to understand the incarnational nature of

²⁰ Paul Borden, "Preaching as Narrative" (lecture, Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA, 4 October 2005). See also Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

²¹ Paul Borden relies on materials from "Words of Delight: The Bible as Literature," the first in a series of four lectures by Leland Ryken, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Dallas, TX, Jan-Mar, 1990.

²² Also helpful in this process is Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe's *Biblical Interpretation: a Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996).

²³ Lawrence Wilkes, "The Messenger" (lecture, Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA, 20 October 2003).

preaching. A human being communicates God's Word. United Methodists have at their disposal Scripture, experience, tradition and reason, as components of the classical Wesleyan quadrilateral, but they also have their personality, passion, giftedness and talents to employ in communicating God's Word.

During this session the foundation was laid for this research on values as the work of Aubrey Malphurs was introduced (see chapter 2). Values are the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive ministry. And concurrently, values are the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive a pastor. Not only do churches need to discover their core values, but so too do their pastors. To this end, this pastor used a variety of tools, including individual counseling, the above-mentioned Hartman Profile, Percept's "ichange" inventory, and profile assessment (see chapter 6).

Though the Word of God is constant, the forms of communication and interpretation, the personality of the preacher, and *The Milieu* add enormous variation. The Milieu, the third course of the Schuller School challenges the pastor to identify the characteristics and needs of the context—again suited well to this project. Questions addressed in this segment include, "Who is the audience?" "What are they looking for?" "What are their needs?" This inquiry would include characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, social/economic status and religious background. In one lecture, Dr. Juan Carlos Ortiz impressed upon his class the need to communicate timeless concepts in different ways. For example, one can say, "I am the light of the world." Or, in Ortiz' words, "I once bought a house with little windows and had to knock out walls to make light come in. Our lives are like the house. Let the light in." Ortiz emphasized the dignity of all human beings by suggesting the example of Christ, who comes in true humility and

grace. If we respect people, we can more easily share the Gospel.²⁴ This course of the Schuller School fit perfectly with identifying contextual needs of the church.

And, finally, *The Message* cannot be effective without the prior three coming together, for forms, purposes and styles of messages, along with preparation, must mesh into a cohesive whole. During this session, Dr. Sandra Herron discussed the concept of essence, referred to earlier in this chapter, through which the message becomes an instrument by God to allow God's essence to shine through. Therefore the message is not so much performance as it is an opportunity for intrinsic values and truth to be revealed.

These education and counseling experiences combined to inform the development of the preaching series for this project. Although thousands of years of biblical, historical, and theological materials could be used, the final decision about messages to preach turned into a rather easy task. Research had revealed certain reoccurring themes. And in that research certain biblical stories consistently emerged. These stories tended to focus on high dramatic moments in Scripture and history that defined the people of God. High moments in the ministry of Joshua, Josiah and Isaiah emerged along with the development of the church and Paul's difficulties with the Corinthians, and overarching all is the centrality of Christ's ministry. Although many other stories could have been added, limits had to be set. Woven into the messages were contemporary illustrations (see appendix D) encountered by other churches in regards to the general area to be mined; missions, evangelism, worship, social action, and so forth. Three of these church illustrations came directly from personal encounter and knowledge. The fourth

²⁴ Juan Carlos Ortiz "The Milieu" (lecture, Schuller School for Preaching, Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA, 20 April 2004).

contemporary story emerged out of research. Other historical illustrations encountered in research were also included in the messages.

Focus Groups

The preaching venue works well to establish the biblical, historical, and theological context for values discussion. But to ascertain what precise values are held in the hearts of the members of the congregation, significant interaction needs to follow. This interaction is essential for Evangel Heights not to repeat its history or the history of most churches this researcher has served. Table 6 outlines the overall implementation.

Table 6
Components of Implementation

Sunday Message Series (eight weeks)
Sunday morning focus group (eight weeks)
Saturday retreat-styled focus group (five hours)
Questionnaire (ten open-ended questions)
Survey (thirty statements—Likert scale)

Since the preaching series is the hub, the spokes going out from the hub are the focus groups which provided the raw data from which to draw conclusions. An ambitious regimen of nine focus groups in two venues provided this raw data. The focus groups contributed the bulk of the information needed for coding the responses within the context. The first venue was an immediate Sunday morning response to the message in an adult Sunday School class lasting eight weeks. The second venue comprised a five-hour

experience encompassing four sessions. In each of these venues all present in the church were invited to participate, regardless of church membership, duration of membership, involvement in leadership, or lack of leadership experience.

The core membership of the *Sunday morning focus group* was an existing Sunday School class that had started soon after this pastor arrived at Evangel Heights Church. The class, which had been in existence for five months prior to the project period, had already been familiar with a format of discussing the Sunday morning message. Questions generated by the pastor provided the focal point for past discussions. The format for the class often resembled a sequence made popular by Serendipity Bible Studies with an opening segment of warm-up “getting started,” followed by a segment of “digging deeper” involving the context of the Scripture and more in depth Bible study, then concluding with “application.” This pattern is similar to what Strauss and Corbin refer to as sensitizing, theoretical, and practical questions.²⁵ This familiar format to the Sunday school class was used for the eight week series of focus groups.

The focus group questions were designed to complement message materials. Written by the researcher, each question allowed open reflection on the biblical material and encouraged freedom of response. The following guidelines directed the development of the questions:

- Is the focus group question open ended?
- Does the question advance discussion of a specific concept area (such as missions)?
- How will this question reveal more information related to the larger purpose of study?

²⁵ Strauss and Corbin, *Qualitative Research*, 77.

- What part of the questionnaire or survey question does the focus group complement?
- Does the question lend itself to the “warming up, digging deeper, application” format familiar to the class?

Unlike the original class, which was loosely organized, the Sunday morning focus group needed to be highly organized. The leadership of the focus group consisted of one staff member and a second back-up leader who is an active member of the church. Other roles defined at the outset included a time keeper, two others to take responsibility for primary and back-up tape recordings, one note taker, a secretary to secure and monitor releases (giving permission to record participants) and attendance, and, a transcriber who was not present during the focus group. The contextual associates thought that the transcriber should be independent from the group so as to listen carefully and objectively not “recall” or “assume” portions of the conversation. Defining these roles in advance takes considerable pressure off the researcher, allowing for concentration on creating the messages and focus group questions. The researcher’s role in the focus groups, then, is limited to that of observer.

The second venue, the *Saturday focus group*, was conducted differently. This researcher believes that the first format allows maximum involvement of laity with rather passive involvement by the pastor. The second venue takes this idea one step beyond the Sunday morning experience. The pastor is not present at all for the day-long experience. Instead, the Doctor of Ministry contextual team took care of all of the logistics of the day, and an experienced focus group leader from the North Indiana Conference led this group. This facilitator was known to certain participants in the focus group, but had no ties to Evangel Heights. The number of Scriptures covered from the message series were

reduced by half to four. The questions remained the same but were fewer in number. These reductions made the Saturday venue less grueling. The significant difference in this day-long format should be evident to the reader; there was no immediate response to the preached message. Four key illustrations (see appendix D) in addition to related Scriptures were used. Conversations with the facilitator prior to the event allowed the group leader to have ownership in the process as well as clarity of purpose. Similar to the Sunday morning focus groups, a support team included one to take field notes, one to tape record, and one as secretary for gathering forms. The responses of this group are compared and contrasted to the responses of the other groups.

Questionnaire and Survey

One additional layer—actually two—expand and enhance the information gathering. With permission of Baker Publishing House a questionnaire and survey of core values developed by Aubrey Malphurs was included to create *triangulation*. In other words, the collective focus group responses can be compared to responses from written questionnaires and surveys from the general church. Once again, anyone was able to participate, including visitors. These questionnaires and surveys were made available to any interested persons for a period of four weeks during the opening weeks of the message series. See appendix B for these resources.

Even though the questionnaires and survey categories are established by the publisher, the contextual team adapted Malphurs' material and modified, added, and deleted some questions and categories to adapt them to Evangel Heights. Only slight modifications ultimately were incorporated into the tools used at Evangel Heights.

Because one member of the contextual team has experience in field research with various faith-based community organizations, including the Salvation Army, he tabulated the results of the survey. See appendix F for complete results.

Coordination of Responses

Questions for the focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires were coordinated. For each focus group, reference numbers that corresponded directly to the questions on either the survey or the questionnaire were given at the top of each leader guide. This coordination permits a direct comparison between the responses to any question, regardless of the source of the question. During the coding process these direct comparison were vital.

The contextual team and researcher using the hybrid process provided by grounded theory and value theory handled coding jointly. The coding process disclosed what the church understands to be their core values. Once the coding process was completed, revealing the core values of the church, the final phase of the operation could begin.

Involvement of the Staff-Parish Committee

The final phase of the project involved relaying the discoveries made to the staff-parish committee to integrate the findings into the church profile statement. Initially, these materials were introduced as, "What we have learned about ourselves." But more than that, a goal was to force the staff-parish committee to wrestle with the precise wording of the profile and make adaptations to the current statement to make it reflect the

new findings. The church profile should be given a wider hearing once completed so that it can be used in the appointment process, but also reviewed annually at the charge conference meeting, the annual congregational meeting of the church under the leadership of the district superintendent.

The plan is to meet in stages with the staff-parish committee. The first stage was to communicate with the entire committee preliminary results of coding from the contextual associates. Because the entire committee did not want to be a part of negotiating the actual statement, a sub-committee was formed to work with the pastor to digest the materials. A preliminary statement was then presented to the committee for discussion and, subsequent, approval. Beyond the work of the staff-parish committee, the entire church, through the church council and the annual charge conference, may seek input into the final draft of the church profile. These additional steps fall outside of the limits of this project, but would be a healthy and sure indication of the success of this project if interest and excitement about this statement would come to the attention of the entire church and not simply remain as an internal document exclusively for the staff-parish committee in its narrowest use for selecting a new pastor.

The next chapter recounts actual occurrences, the work of the contextual team, the conduct of the focus groups, and some surprising discoveries for those who were involved with the coding and writing process.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This chapter focuses upon the progression of work over an eight-month period and the results. Five major components—message development, conduct of focus groups, survey and questionnaire, coding, and work with the staff-parish committee—lead to the finished project, which is, more realistically, the work in progress. To replicate this experience, these five areas are most critical.

Message Series Development

Development of the message series formed the groundwork for the congregation to wrestle with biblical, historical, and theological core values. The foundation materials reveal core passages of Scripture promoting core value motifs. The illustrations and historical backdrops emerged in the months leading up to the final development of the series and were based on personal study, pastoral experience and prominent illustrations publicly discussed through the North Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Some struggle emanated from determining precisely how many weeks the series should run. The series needed to be long enough to reveal attitudes of the church. Too short a period would not generate enough information or place respondents into enough groups to create trust. Too long a period, however, would run the risk of not sustaining

interest as well as create more information than could possibly be digested, given the size of the research team. A time of eight weeks was decided on. Different contexts may want to contemplate this issue more fully, depending on need. These issues are covered more thoroughly in chapter 6.

With most of the foundational materials in place, the formatting of the series developed rapidly during a personal planning retreat in November, 2005. The message series outlined in table 7 may be found in its entirety in appendix C. Only the first three messages were fully scripted and pre-planned prior to implementing the series. Influenced by grounded theory, the study required flexibility. If the initial messages and focus groups generated nothing pertinent to the needs of the study, a mid-course correction could be taken. No changes were deemed necessary to the following outline.

Table 7
“True to the Core” Message Series, 2006

January 8:	2 Kings 22-23 and Matthew 2:1-12	<i>A Tale of Two Kings</i>
January 15:	Joshua 24	<i>House Rule: God Rules</i>
January 22:	Isaiah 58	<i>What's In the Store?</i>
January 29:	2 Corinthians 9:6-10	<i>Giving Away the Store</i>
February 5:	Matthew 28:16-20, John 20-21 Luke 24	<i>Jesus' Resurrection Words</i>
February 12:	Acts 2:42-47	<i>Value Added Community</i>
February 19:	Acts 6:1-7	<i>Passing the Dish</i>
February 26:	I Corinthians 1, 15	<i>The Value Giver</i>

A weekly report, consisting of focus group field notes and transcripts, allowed opportunity to assess future direction. If certain questions arose one week, emerging needs were addressed within the weeks following. In this way the message series built momentum. It should also be noted here that this church has recently become accustomed to preaching in series, not lectionary preaching. However, neither church nor pastor find printed worksheets, outlines or power point advantageous. The training of the Schuller School would not preclude the use of such tools but, rather, emphasize the spoken form utilizing the personality and presence of the speaker.

Focus Group Development

The focus groups proved to be the heart of the project. During Advent the current message-oriented Sunday school class decided to become the core focus group. Pronounced excitement by the existing group encouraged the contextual team. If the group had been unwilling to take on this role, an entirely different strategy for focus groups would have had to be developed. So far the plan continued to fall into place.

During this time the team that would make the focus group function effectively, as envisioned in chapter 4, was recruited. A field note taker, a timekeeper, a record keeper, and a person to tape record each session came from within the group. During this time the facilitator was trained and coached on project history and purpose. The facilitator's background as a Stephen's Minister¹ and her inclusion on the contextual team made the training minimal. Although recording equipment was tested ahead of time, a

¹ Stephen's Ministers receive extensive training nationally and locally for care giving, listening skills and ministry.

combination of initial technical problems and the size of the group required a second person to tape record.

Given that anyone could be added to the class, an influx of new people arrived, especially during the first three weeks, swelling the average attendance of ten to over twenty-four and ultimately involving a total of forty-five over the eight-week series. They comprised a wide range in age and involvements in the church. Many core leaders of the church, including the chair of the staff-parish committee, the chair of finance, the chair of the church council, staff members, and adult and youth group leaders were consistently present. Members of almost every ministry area participated. The overall attitude charged the room with anticipation and excitement. For many participants, this was the first opportunity to engage in conversation about the core values of the church.

In the open environment created all could participate and safely share opinions. After about two weeks the group bonded into a community of trust. Discovered were deeply held feelings about the church, some positive and some negative, sometimes surprising and sometimes predictable clichés. Immediately after the initial message, the first focus group grappled with an illustration that emerged out of Kent Hunter's materials entitled, "Art's tough day" (see appendix D), a disarming scenario about a well-entrenched church member whose traditional Sunday morning parking spot and pew were occupied by newcomers. This humorous opening revealed a very sensitive issue for some that called into question one of the commonly perceived core values of the church: "We are a friendly church." Three persons in the first focus group revealed that they had been asked to move to another pew on their first visit to Evangel Heights because, "That pew *belongs* to" It had happened to one focus group member that very day. From this

moment forward nothing could be assumed about Evangel Heights in this project. Close scrutiny would be required to analyze the perceived value of openness and hospitality.

Though some do see the church as open and diverse in some ways (i.e. developmentally disabled adults, and theological openness), the church remains predominantly of one race and rather singular in thought. For example, the transcript of a portion of focus group eight captures responses to a question posed about what core values predominate at Evangel Heights:

ME: [inaudible] What would Jesus do? That would be a specific core value—teaching.

MB: And I think along with that core value that we have established a core value having an open community.

PP: An open community?

MB: That centers around those core values. You can't turn people away. I think you make sure it is an open community. If it is, it is a growing community.

BE: Do you think [inaudible].

MB: I think people get turned away, not necessarily here This church is very open. But at other churches it is an exclusive relationship

PP: Could you describe for me what an open community means to you?

MB: First of all a community means that—my brother-in-law and I had a discussion, sort of, about this last night—we have been here twenty-five years in this extended family. Now a family is not always “let's get together around the Thanksgiving table and all celebrate Thanksgiving.” There is always a lot of good and bad going on in family relationships. Yet, the family is who we go back to and that is a very strong part of why we are still here because the family is [inaudible] so the community becomes family. It is a larger context concept. By open I mean, I think, that if you can, if you are not growing, you are dying. That is how I look at life. If you are not learning something or bringing someone new in, eventually you become a closed community. A closed community you see all over this town. My mom goes to a closed community church and they are all in their 75's and 80's and [inaudible]. That's why it is so important to be open. We have, I mean, we are a fairly diverse church.

CC: *Not at all!*

PK: *No we're not!*

MB: You don't think so? I think we are tremendously diverse as far as attitudes and abilities.

BB: Oh?

BE: Yeah! You think of the special needs people we have in the church. That is

diverse! I mean you can't everyone [sic] have their own way in diversity, but I think that M.'s right. I think there are a lot of diverse ideas.

PP: What does diversity mean to you, that makes you respond that we are not that way?

CC: Diversity for me was cultural.

PK: I think so too. And we may have, as M. said, a group of people that have different ways of thinking at Evangel Heights. I don't know if that—we are pretty much a white congregation that's not very poor and we are maybe not too rich—but we are all kind of in that same cultural thing. We are not diverse at all. I think we are far from diverse.

ME: I think another thing about open community is honesty. To be open and honest with each other. To be able to say, you know, I do this and will you help me through this [inaudible]. Instead of putting on airs and trying to be something or somebody that you are not or trying to live . . . it's good to be able to be open with your neighbor. Let them know who you really are and how you really think and how you really feel. And then I think the Holy Spirit can work.²

When it comes to openness and hospitality, opinions diverge. For some, Evangel Heights is clearly open to those who are like the members. Disagreement in this discussion was encouraging. That the focus group could honestly engage with this issue while some openly disagreed with others without fear of being ostracized gives the reader a good sense of how most conversations flowed. The group members' willingness to challenge each other and reflect critically on the nature of the church was most helpful to the researcher. Their model serves well for interpreting data, coding, and drawing conclusions.

The Survey Results

The third area of discussion centers on survey and questionnaire results. The surveys were distributed on New Year's weekend, one week prior to the message series. Perhaps because the Christmas season had just ended and the New Year begun, the number of respondents was lackluster; only 47 were returned of 140 distributed. The

² Focus group eight, 26 February 2006.

questionnaire and survey were printed back to back on one piece of paper with the format taken directly from the selected source (see appendix B).³

The purpose of the survey, however, generated some questions. The instructions read: “Use this tool to indicate what you think is important to you at Evangel Heights.” The team thought this wording was clear to mean, “We want to know what *you* think are the core values important to *you* at the church *now*. ” Apparently the instruction was not clear enough for three persons. A follow-up clarification during worship the following week and face-to-face conversation with the three who raised the issue cleared up confusion.

The survey asked respondents to do two things. First, *rate* thirty concepts on a Likert scale one (low) to five (high). Second, looking at no more than twelve concepts rated four or five, *rank* from one (high) to twelve (low). All but one of the thirty concepts received ratings of four or five. That one concept, “status quo,” had no ratings of four or five by anyone. The highest *rated* concepts (rated four or five) in descending order were, as follows:

95.7% Bible-centered preaching/teaching

95.7% Welcoming visitors

93.5% Godly servant leadership

93.5% Christian Education (all ages)

91.3% All people matter to God

91.3% Local missions

³ The value audits used for this research came from the first edition of Aubrey Malphurs' *Values-Driven Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 185-87. Subsequent to the use of these materials the second edition of this work was discovered. Future researchers should consider using the clearer and updated audits.

The lowest percentages of concepts *rated* four or five were:

34.8% Prophetic voice for social justice

30.4% Adherence to tradition

28.3% Praise and contemporary worship

23.9% Use of modern media in worship

All these percentages relate to the number of people who rated a given concept four or five. In other words, 95.7 percent of the people rated Bible-centered preaching/teaching either four or five, and only 23.9 percent of the respondents rated use of modern media as important to them by rating this concept four or five.

Next, when the respondents were asked to *rank* their top-rated value concepts, they were forced to make decisions. Because any given respondent could have rated any number of items four or five, the most essential values emerged in the ranking process. Responses were sorted into clusters of three, that is, concepts ranked one, two or three; concepts were ranked four, five or six; seven, eight or nine; and ten, eleven or twelve. The top six *rated* value concepts listed above are generally confirmed by the following percentages based on all respondents who *ranked* the value concepts either first, second or third, that is, the most important of the top-rated items.

60.9% Bible-centered preaching/teaching

56.5% Godly servant leadership

30.4% All people matter to God

30.4% Christian Education (all ages)

These percentages correspond closely with their *ratings*, but a great discrepancy appears with two of the top six rated values noted above:

8.7% Welcoming visitors

2.2% Local missions

In other words, despite the fact that over 90 percent of the respondents rated welcoming visitors and local missions four or five, in comparison with other highly-rated value concepts, only slightly more than 2 percent of the respondents considered local mission among their top three values. Similarly, only about 9 percent of the respondents indicate that welcoming visitors rises to the top three of their value list. The contextual team and staff-parish committee members were shocked at these findings. These statistics were more than corroborated by the focus groups. Appendix F reveals the full breakdown of all survey responses.

The Questionnaire

In addition to the survey, members of the congregation had an opportunity to answer ten open-ended questions. Forty-seven people responded to the questionnaire. When asked in what ministry area the respondent spent most of their time at Evangel Heights, thirty-four indicated some form of educational setting. The eighty-five references to teaching, discipleship, personal growth, Sunday school or education, predominated the questionnaire. This result became the first clear indicator of one of the prominent core values of the church. Hereafter, however, the questionnaire produced widespread responses, producing initial evidence that Evangel Heights does not possess a distinctive identity uniformly expressed across the membership of the church.

Clusters of responses appeared in certain typical areas, including seventeen general comments about involvement in worship; fourteen indicated time spent in prayer

outside of the formal structures of the church, while eight listed devotional time with family. Thirteen noted the friendly, welcoming nature of the church. In response to what excites the respondent most about the church, the respondents' answers become much more dispersed, with preaching named most—eight. Somewhat surprising, twenty-six people mentioned “teach, share, show, and grow” by name as their understanding of the core values of the church. But overall, the nature of the responses is characterized as dispersed.

Of the forty-seven responses to the questionnaires/surveys, only seven participated in the focus groups and only three were contextual associates. Some of the contextual associates felt that they knew too much of the inner workings of the project to appropriately participate in certain forms of the research. When taken altogether, survey, questionnaires and focus groups, eighty-two persons participated in some form of the research. Though the survey and questionnaire added depth to the understanding of the core values of the church, the focus groups provided the yeoman's share of the information. The quality of the responses in the open-ended focus groups proved superior to that of any other source of information.

The Coding Process

The fourth area of consideration, the use of grounded and value theories in coding, allows enormous creativity and latitude in interpretation, but not to the point of taking liberties with interpretation. The protocols of coding outlined in chapter 4 give direction and establish parameters. Transcriptions of focus group meetings arrived within two to three days at the pastor's office and field notes typically arrived by e-mail within

twenty-four hours. This quick turnaround allowed for timely reflection before the next sequence of events. At the conclusion of the series, a more thorough reading of transcripts initiated the open coding by the researcher before others read the transcripts. The coding process was compared in chapter 4 to dumping puzzle pieces on the table for sorting; the process began in precisely that way. The researcher gave the contextual associates an opportunity to code as well. One contextual associate coded the surveys and questionnaires in addition to the researcher. The entire contextual team conducted a “coding party” to compare transcripts as each member of the team coded one or two transcripts independent from the researcher. This cross checking allowed a second look at each transcript during the open coding process.

The contextual associates received a list of initial codes from the researcher as recorded in table 8. The codes chosen were not rigid but, rather, open to discussion and change, depending on the dynamic process that would unfold during the coding party. The goal was to keep the open coding process simple and memorable without extraneous categories and without any numbering systems. Alert to *in vivo* possibilities, almost everything discovered, nonetheless, fit the traditional concepts listed below. Using value

Table 8
Open (Systemic) Codes

God	Evangelism
Jesus	Personal Sharing
Holy Spirit	Hospitality
Missions	Social Action
Leadership	Teaching
Lay	Scripture
Pastoral	Disciple making
Worship	Preaching
Stewardship	Prayer

theory concepts, this list reflects the *systemic values*, those broad basic categories of which could be asked, “Is it?” or “Is it not?” In other words, is this or is this not missions, evangelism, teaching and so forth. The simplicity of this list belies the depth and dynamics of the responses, for early on certain sub-categories were developed. For example, teaching immediately developed sub-categories including use of Scripture, disciple-making experiences such as classes and Bible studies, and preaching.

In addition to the concept of hospitality already earlier mentioned, those reading the transcripts perceived weak areas in the life of the church. For instance, coders were astonished that prayer was not a more significant factor in the life of the church. Though no overt question pressed the issue of prayer during the focus groups, respondents had ample opportunity to reflect on prayer through open ended questions such as “How do you deal with conflict?” “What are the priorities and values of the church?” “How do you make decisions?” If prayer were a part of the fabric of the life of the church, respondents would bring up some aspect of prayer in their answers to these questions. In addition, if focus group leaders led respondents to think more intentionally about prayer, no doubt discussants would have talked more about the subject. However, if prayer figures prominently in the life of the church, it should naturally emerge in conversation without leading questions.

References to grace appear less than prayer in the transcripts. Numerous understandings were voiced of how God worked with God’s creation and humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit and through Jesus, but little if no mention was made specifically of grace as that quality of God’s interaction with humanity, or graciousness as a quality for interpersonal relationships. A look between the lines reveals vague and

veiled grace-like approaches to evangelism (discussed later in this chapter), such as the concept of free choice dominant in the conversations. Using Maddox's template for responsible grace (chapter 3)—pardon, healing power for body and soul, and God's presence resulting in personal, societal, and creational transformation—an attempt was made to locate how Evangel Heights lives out a grace-filled life. The prominent feature expressed at Evangel Heights was personal transformation, but the more complete understanding of grace outlined above was not evidenced. Although a deep understanding of grace is one of the preeminent tenets of historical Methodism, one of the staff-parish members reading through transcripts slumped in her chair aghast at this glaring deficiency in understanding the richness of our heritage in this matter. The researcher concurs.

The staff-parish subcommittee responsible for the initial writing of the core value statement believes a holistic understanding of stewardship, beyond money issues, also is not evident in the materials. "Stewardship is *our response* to God's grace," commented one staff-parish member. Another staff-parish member commented that this narrow understanding may be due in part to the recent history of the church and the downturn in attendance and resources to do the church's mission. Only brief comments could be uncovered about spiritual giftedness, use of time, or environmental concern as related to stewardship.

One staff-parish member pointed out that Evangel Heights is good about supporting the ministries and work of many different people as long as "they did their thing and I could do mine." This showed itself most prominently in the illustration dealing with African mission needs in Nyembo (see appendix D and related transcript for

focus group four in appendix E). It became abundantly clear in the focus groups that nothing would come of this project, had it happened at Evangel Heights, unless, “one or two people pushed the idea.”⁴

The open coding process led to more than the coders bargained for. Core values became apparent, but deficiencies were exposed. But coding is not the end; the transcripts must be allowed to continue to tell the value story of Evangel Heights. To do this, additional steps must be taken to accomplish the goal: writing a core value statement to be included in the church profile.

Assembling the Pieces

Using the open codes and organizing and defining them permits creating the unique value story of Evangel Heights. Transcripts and questionnaire responses were collated according to the systemic codes, then further sifted using extrinsic property lists that allowed the staff-parish subcommittee to engage directly with the raw materials in a simplified and somewhat systematic way. This secondary level of coding assembles the pieces and aligns materials into a cohesive model or story. The following three tables reveal the property lists used for their respective categories of codes. *The extrinsic values are the words used to sift the transcripts and other data to make sure coders were not missing important information in the assembly process.* The discussion of grace a few paragraphs earlier foreshadowed this process. The reader is invited to fully participate in this process here. In each area the reader should feel free to add descriptive words, or extrinsic values. *The codes are the key* to unlocking our data to create our core value statement. The entire coding system with extrinsic properties appears in appendix G.

⁴ Focus group four, 29 January 2006.

Only three value concepts most telling in the composition of the core value statement are discussed in this chapter.

Core Concept: Community

The first value, community, is not included in the initial coding system.

Community emerged through the coding party held by the contextual team and, in fact, turns out to be one of the most significant areas. In this study extrinsic values are confined to the Christian community, as the church, though sociological and anthropological studies would add extraordinary depth to the property list. In fact, many extrinsic properties could easily be placed in more than one value concept. The various discussion and conversations reveal qualities of community consistently: free choice, Scripture-based, the role of evangelism, discipleship, God's interaction with individuals and the world, and the transformation of individual lives. The following table and transcript clearly show some of these foci.

Table 9
Extrinsic Properties of Community

Proleptic	Prophetic
Sacramental	Transformative
Fellowship of the Spirit	Body of Christ
Gathering of the faithful	Servant
Place of free will and grace	Place of acceptance and love
Godly vision and mission	Dealing with change
Deals with world and personal conflict	Place to encounter Christ and truth
Communication	Biblically-based

TM: Evangel Heights needs to be biblically-based more than anything.

MB: [Evangel Heights] needs to be reality based because all of us are on

different points of our spiritual walk and there are dangers of being totally scripturally-based, because there are some who are not absolutely convinced of the whole process and might be lost. It is the church's mission to reach people and not lose people during the process of bringing them to Christ.

CB: As people of God, we are people of free will and free choice and it is not Pat's job to tell us what to think; it is his job to give us information so we can make our own decisions.⁵

CM: Recently, I went to the web site of a Christian college, a Baptist college, and you can look at their faculty on line. Every single person gave their saved date. I couldn't believe it. Now that is terrifying to me because there is obviously some expectation that they would have of new people, not that I have. But the point is that anybody they would hire at that institution you need to give your saved date. I think that is very intimidating and uncomfortable. But I would tell people it is up to you, if you want the relationship you have to go after it—so, get busy. Go to church and get into some kind of a Bible study because as you study it, truths are revealed. That is the foundation for the beginning of a relationship.

ME: I would just show them a little bit because obviously they are looking to find information about Jesus and God. So it's problematic because the Holy Spirit has already burdened them. So you could possibly show some specific directives in the Bible that would show who Christ is and maybe the Holy Spirit would allow them to see a little bit more of Christ and create a relationship just on the words that are already written.⁶

Transcripts show that the concept of freedom was expressed in a variety of ways during the focus groups. This focus on freedom is expressed in the final core value statement in two significant ways: first, the free choice that individuals can express in their relationship with God and others, and, second, the desire on the part of many in the church to understand the mindset of those who are searching and journeying with their faith life. This church does not express itself in formulaic answers, but understands the human condition and the desire of people to seek God.

⁵ Focus group two, 15 January 2006.

⁶ Ibid.

Given this understanding, the focus groups still indicated the importance of maintaining a standard of what the church should be. When pointedly asked about the purpose of the church, discussants responded as follows:

CC: To build each other up so that we can gain the strength that we need to go out.

DL: Worship God! Worship God! You will get the strength. I think it is always the purpose of the church to worship God and make disciples of people.

JS: I think that all of us are to be the Body of Christ.

ME: So the purpose of the church then is to be the physical Christ in the world as we are, uh, the Body of Christ. The church building possibly could just be a nice gas station.

TC: A place to equip the saints.

ME: I remember the pastor's core mission statement about hope at our Leadership Summit. I forgot it all. Anyhow, the hope to give the people a "no fear" lifestyle based on the fact we put ourselves under the discipline of love—God's love as opposed to our own haphazard ways.⁷

ME: I have one word that reminds us of community—communicate. And I think that a church family talks to each other and is involved and really communicates with each other.

MD: Being able to bring fresh ideas and not argue about them. We need to not always totally agree with each other, because I think if we agree with each other constantly we can go off the wrong way.

MB: I think in order to have a strong community like that with new ideas we need to recognize they are going to be controversial, but if you really believe that and people are good over a long haul, the best idea emerges.

TC: Every community is united in thought. Whether there are different opinions, family size, color, every different diversity, the community develops opinions, theological understandings. But there is one thing that unifies our family. And I guess, uh, the key thing for me is that the ideal family, I mean community, is identifying that one thing. That has the glue and is going to stick us together. That is going to bond the whole community. Maybe it is Christ.

LM: Ideally, for a church community, I would hope that that one thing would be Christ.⁸

⁷ Focus group six, 12 February 2006.

⁸ Ibid.

Freedom is clearly expressed, but within the boundaries of the scriptural, historical community of faith. And clearly, the church is expected to teach and equip people to meet the challenges of the world in a Christ-like manner. In this equipping process, some even see an evangelistic necessity.

Core Concept: Evangelism

Like most churches, Evangel Heights struggles with differentiating between evangelism and mission. Most churches conceive of missions as reflecting outward, organized efforts to touch the lives of people with the Gospel. Missions is often energized by a specific needs-meeting experience, such as building a school house, hurricane relief, health care, or agricultural assistance. Evangelism, on the other hand, distinguishes itself in the minds of many people by being a personal act of faith-sharing to introduce individuals to Christ or providing opportunity for individuals to accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Though mission experiences are pregnant with possibilities of evangelism, not all evangelism is necessarily seen as mission in the minds of people. Another curious component to understanding missions from the perspective of Evangel

Table 10
Extrinsic Properties of Evangelism

Personal testimony (Worship)	Personal testimony (private)
Friendship	Hospitality
Trust	Serendipitous moments
Intentional	Outreach into community
Respect	Relational
Service-oriented	

Heights' is that it tends to be equated with fund-raising activity, whereas evangelism becomes a personal investment that carries a certain amount of risk. Table 10 lists some of the salient features of evangelism while the following transcript reveals feelings of uncertainty, respect, and freedom.

LM: I don't want to be a stumbling block, so I feel like there are many times that I am constantly weighing what I am saying to people so that I am not a stumbling block—or should I have said something at work? Should I have said this? Can I bring up the name of Jesus in this instance? Or am I showing them by what I am doing or how I am acting that am I showing Christ's love in any way, shape, or form. So, I think it is kind of like a continuum every day all of the time, you know.

ME: I try to help people find their own personal vision of Christ. I listen and talk to people about their past experience. What is their passion? What do they find? What makes them tick? And try to encourage them in a specific way that may fulfill their lives as well as help others know Christ more.

BB: The first thing you have to do is build a relationship. It has taken me five years to build trust relationships.⁹

CC: If you say "He is my Savior and Lord of my life," . . . if I say that, it kind of sounds haughty and kind of holier than thou kind of thing. And I think that the people I relate to want to know that it is real and something that they can do now, not something that they might learn to do, that they have to be at a certain place before they can enjoy God's grace. So that communication for me has to be very personal. The people who are asking me are not in front of all the people. It is usually one on one. The other operators are someplace else in the hospital and they ask me directly. Like, "Where do you go to church?" and "What do the people believe?" and "How do you guys worship?" And so the other thing at work, I sit down at another station and when another intern calls me, we will talk about that. And they also have relationships and I ask them about that. "How did God work through your life?" Not always preaching, but taking from them. Drawing from them. Giving them an opportunity to tell how God works in their lives every day. What a blessing!¹⁰

⁹ Focus group three, 22 January 2006.

¹⁰ Focus group five, 5 February 2006.

Even in evangelism a healthy understanding of free will allows individuals to discover their own personal relationship with God. Sometimes some fear is attached to the process, but respondents express enormous respect for the needs of the other individual and being able to live a Christ-like witness. Some clearly understand that they participate with God in the process of bringing people to a deeper understanding of their relationship with God through Christ.

Core Concept: Education

One of the most important areas in the life of Evangel Heights is education. From staffing to the number of adult Sunday school classes, small groups, and Bible studies, education has for many years been seen as the strong suit for the church. Perhaps a better word is discipleship. Clearly articulated, strongly believed, and dearly cherished, education occupies the first position of core values in the minds of many at Evangel Heights. Perceived of as the need for strong messages from the pulpit, high relativity to individual and world needs, and spiritual development, education is among the highest rated of all church experiences. The following table lists several extrinsic properties of teaching research and discussants named, as the ensuing transcript shows:

Table 11
Extrinsic Properties of Teaching

Biblically-centered	Historically relevant
Small group	Bible study
Disciple class	Mentoring
Discussion group	Expository preaching
Leadership development	Disciple-making
Application to world events	Application to personal life

TM: Discipleship is a slow process, biblically based but not “Bible thumpers.” You have to bring it to them in their walk, but still stay true to Scripture, not watering it down.”¹¹

WB: You know, I have always heard when I have asked what’s our image, “We are a friendly church,” which I know is true. But just recently, since the class has started, I really feel the gift this church has is intelligence. We have some real servant people, and it just amazes me. I mean, we could, we really have some servant and gifted people—teachers and educators. I don’t really think we realize our gift.

?: That was really evident a week ago yesterday. The outstanding leaders.

JS: You mean the Leadership Summit? Good example.

WB: We really do have good educational programming. I don’t think we even realize. I am much more grateful and am much more aware of what a gift it is.

MB: Adult education—we are known for that and we are darned good at it. And that is where a lot of people get tied into the church is through that. So, we are pretty good at the stuff.¹²

JS: Let’s list the things Jesus asked of his disciples in his resurrection appearances.

JS: Make disciples.

MB: The words that were spoken today, “Let’s get out there.”

TC: That’s imperative. Make disciples.

ME: We can go out with gumption and know that it is all taken care of and it is all alright [sic]. One of the things that kept jumping out for me was “All I have commanded you.” Then the pastor started talking about the Sermon on the Mount, the Good News. What is the Good News? I think it is fun to think about—go make disciples. But what are the specifics within Christ’s words that we are to actually be teaching? And what is it that we are to teach them to observe? I think that sometimes we get caught up in semantics but not specifics. But I love the baptizing and communion. It is a full circle ideal of exactly what God is. He reconciles us back to Him and then we can communicate with Him every time we eat and drink—think about Christ.

PD: And “love one another as I have loved you.”

TC: You have to understand the mission. What is a disciple? I have always felt it is someone who has accepted Christ as their Savior. We have God’s message, the Gospel, the word “teaching” because not everyone has that gift . . . how you are talking to someone and telling

¹¹ Focus group two, 15 January 2006.

¹² Focus group four, 29 January 2006.

them about your life and explaining those things, you are teaching without realizing you are teaching. And we do it every day with our actions and our words.

ME: In regard to the word “disciple,” its close derivative leads to discipline and putting ourselves under the discipleship or under God’s discipline and not our own discipline. And, of course, Jesus said, “as I commanded you.” He commanded to “love one another.” His “yoke is easy” but we want to make it so hard.

CM: Going back to all the things we have talked about in relationship to this, and I keep coming back to everybody seems to be putting a lot of emphasis on “I’ve got to do it right,” when I talk about God. Most of the time you are not going to be the last person. It may be a chain of fifteen or twenty people. You might be the first person or you might be the last person in the chain. I would think, “Listen to what God tells you.”¹³

PD: Instead of proactive, I’m inactive. I don’t do what he [pastor] preached about today, in my eyes [referencing 1 Corinthians 15].

BE: I want to echo what P. said. I think I really saw myself when he was talking about WWJD. Are you reading the Scripture and studying?

BB: What I feel I have seen is that we still have a long way to go for us to all understand what it really means to have Jesus as Savior in our lives. I think there is still some confusion on what the Scriptures say and what we want to believe.¹⁴

For Evangel Heights discipleship is a process. The comments center on a process that never finds completion. A seeking and searching spirit prevails through the lives of many people at the church. The church fulfills its purpose when it teaches God’s Word, but not in an autocratic way, but rather a Socratic way, inquiring, reflecting, questioning, synthesizing. Intrinsic to this process is a willingness to engage people at different levels even when they do not agree. As quoted earlier, “We need to not always totally agree with each other, because I think if we agree with each other constantly, we can go off the wrong way.”¹⁵ This teaching is inspired by the Holy Spirit. We are to lead and teach by

¹³ Focus group five, 5 February 2006.

¹⁴ Focus group eight, 26 February 2006.

¹⁵ Focus group six, 12 February 2006.

example and positively reinforce spiritual development. The pastor has a key role to play in creating an environment for spiritual growth to take place, but even here, the pastor's role is not exclusive. Many have responsibility in teaching:

SK: I have appreciated Pastor Pat being in the Bible so much as opposed to just Scripture time. The fact that he goes back to that repeatedly, encourages us to follow in our Bible because, to be honest, I learned more about Josiah last week than I ever knew. Because that is not one of the stories I am going to be reading about in my Bible. That is not one of the stories I am going to pick out. So I think that the fact so much Scripture and the biblical basics are coming out from the pastor, it gives us as a congregation the opportunity to see things in the Bible we all know. Then it is up to you to process it and get going. The bottom line is what is in the Bible is the main thing. Where it goes from there is the choice of the person.¹⁶

Once again, the concept of free will arises. This is a prevalent theme that did not come to the attention of anyone coding until late in the process with the staff-parish subcommittee.

These passages give merely a taste of the coding process and the system used for sifting information. A single conversation may be coded in a multitude of ways. Coding does not always create neat, exclusive boxes detailing all one needs to know about a particular concept. But taken together, all the observations allow trends to emerge in a process akin to marinating fine steak. The give and take discussions cannot be replicated—the reading, praying and creativity that funneled all of this information into the initial core value statement. At times the transcripts needed to be set aside to allow the Holy Spirit to guide. The most beneficial use of this form of coding, however, allows for double checking to assure covering as many bases as possible given time restraints. From the grounded theory perspective, axial coding allows gathering the spoken concepts by the various respondents. Value theory allows analysis of all responses against an

¹⁶ Focus group two, 15 January 2006.

extrinsic property list for each code word. The extrinsic list may actually reflect properties found in historical and biblical contexts or in the contextual collected data. *This check, counter-check process not only allows identification of what is present, but also what may be missing.* This observation is critical to the final step and becomes the core reason why both grounded and value theories were incorporated into the process.

The Staff-Parish Core Value Statement

The last and most critical phase of this project, intrinsic valuation, makes the values particularly Evangel Heights' own. The staff-parish committee wrestled with the materials handed them by the pastor and contextual team. The actual core value statement now begins to be assembled and incorporated into the church profile. Three individuals, two from the staff-parish committee and the pastor worked both independently and cooperatively to develop the statement. Each was asked to summarize the volume of material into just six to eight statements. The members initially met for instruction and review of the project. The subcommittee members read transcripts and coded materials numerous times. The members took this work to heart, submitted preliminary statements and met in a final meeting to assemble materials to submit to the larger committee.

The final meeting lasted nearly four hours, and at times became quite emotional. The depth and passion displayed in the conversation illustrated how important these leaders of the church took their work. Those hours can be described as a discerning process punctuated by periods of silence, prayer, and writing. The intensity of the work was broken by Spirit-filled breakthroughs and sometimes even tears. The tears were

expressions of great joy at finally seeing puzzle pieces lock together. These were the core values agreed upon by all on the subcommittee:

- We value God's interaction with the individual: saving, healing, calling, and strengthening.
- We value the individual's free choice to discover God.
- We value the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the journey toward maturity in faith.
- We value and support the individual's participation in God's work to impact the lives of other people. This participation may be defined by an individual's area of call and passion expressed in, but not limited to, mission, evangelism, or social witness.
- We value searching for truth primarily through Scripture, but also through history, personal experience, and other world experiences.
- We value the church community as an extended family in Christ.

Compared to the original motto of "teach, share, show and grow," these statements are significantly deeper and more reflective of the identity of Evangel Heights Church.

Several on the staff-parish committee were excited to see strong ties to the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. The strength of the church lies in the area of individuals taking initiative in exploring, discovering and expanding their relationship with God through learning experiences based in Scripture.

But the staff-parish subcommittee also identified weak areas. Considerable work is needed in the following areas: individual and community stewardship, developing a deeper understanding of a community of grace, increased work in the area of hospitality, and celebrating individual and corporate victories. One of the members of the subcommittee remarked, "Our church is the oldest child in the story of the prodigal son. We live an attitude of entitlement. We are good at freedom but not at responsibility

(stewardship). We eagerly receive grace, but are poor stewards in extending it to others.”

This is a powerful observation that will be tested as work continues beyond the parameters of this project.

The critical question for this research now becomes what difference these core value statements might have made in prior appointments or will make in future appointments. Without hesitation staff-parish members excitedly commented, “If we had a statement such as this it would have given me more confidence knowing that we were trusting God in the decision rather than following what man was doing in the appointment process.” Another commented, “I would assume that as we share this with the district superintendent that our statement would be passed along to the potential pastor. Then, our whole line of questioning would change compared to what we have been doing.” The entire committee concurred. Along these same lines, another member commented, “For the pastor, the statement will tell whether or not they fit into this church.” Staff-parish members with a clear understanding of core values based on research conducted with the congregation feel confident, informed, and able to articulate the identity and needs of the church throughout the appointment process. As one simply put, “We need to know who we are.”

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study charts a value discovery for one church, and one pastor. Careful reflection will allow a critical look at not only the process but also the response of the church, the pastor, the contextual team, and the staff-parish committee. Already described is the process by which Evangel Heights Church discovered its core values and wrote a core value statement to be used in the appointment process. This chapter evaluates this work and its potential impact upon the church profile, as well as broader implications in the life of the church. In this chapter the methodology is critiqued, not only as it advances the mission of the church, but also as it expands an understanding of methodology by creating a hybrid of grounded and value theories within the qualitative approach.

The Qualitative Approach

First to be assessed is whether the qualitative approach is best suited for this particular context. Chapter 2 asserts that many churches use a quantitative approach as a part of selecting a new pastor. Any application of qualitative or quantitative work currently is foreign to the United Methodist appointment process. As this study specifically relates to the church profile, it attempts to apply procedures to advance the science of appointment-making within the United Methodist Church by including the process outlined in this project.

The experience recorded here with a qualitative approach should suggest to a church of any system, call or appointive, benefits beyond any quantitative study. Rich conversations filled with illustrations dominated the process, elevating relationship-building experiences over quantitative analysis. The revelations uncovered as participants responded to messages significantly shaped the end result. This quality of material and its reliability would not have been discovered in an exclusively quantitative approach.

The qualitative process is clearly more difficult, perhaps why others prefer the quantitative approach. And to be sure, the qualitative process elicits more subjective thinking because participants wrestled with theological concepts and human emotion. Participants got emotionally involved and often related stories to illustrate intangible concepts they were struggling to explain. The exciting story-telling revealed the heart of the people. Consider the passion of BB: “The kids that I deal with at Sidewalk Sunday School in the inner city—if we could help each child be able to read, then they could read their Bible. I have twelve-year-olds that I want to send devotional sheets home with and they cannot read. I cannot give them everything that they need in twenty minutes in a lesson.”¹ The emotion and passion of this comment, which cannot be measured, emerged only through a qualitative process.

Illustrations about other churches (appendix D) allowed for a depth of exchange between participants in focus groups, not possible with quantitative processes or even with qualitative interviews. These stories provided an alternative context from which to view ministry. Although none of the cases reflected the ministries of Evangel Heights Church, they challenged the focus group participants to explore their own feelings or those of the church in light of what other churches believe to be the core of their identity

¹ Focus group three, 22 January 2006.

and what other focus group members believe. This research project succeeded in placing people in situations in which difficult choices had to be made revealing core values to a degree that a survey could not. Consider the response to the illustration of the church that had placed a sign on its front lawn indicating its location to be “A Nuclear Free Zone” and had additionally been known to house refugees:

- ME: We can tap into and start acting like this prophetic church, utilizing our resources, our history, our passion to look and see what God has placed in our midst.
- TM: I think that is a church that really has it together!
- BB: A united church!
- US: A church who knows what their core values are.
- LM: You do have to say that church sounded like they were addressing the needs of their community. And that is what we need to do. What are the needs of our community? What do we need to stand for? Why do we exist on Ironwood and Colfax? What is it?
- CM: I didn’t understand it.
- BV: It is a political statement. That’s how I see it.
- MD: What I heard them saying was just that this church kind of lived on the edge. I would think that the people who went to this church were probably extremely excited with the work they were doing. But I also feel . . . that the church might have been hated.
- CB: The topic of illegal immigration and offer a sanctuary for those people to come and at least not search for their green card . . . it was very controversial, bold move on their part.”²

Once again, a survey could not capture the power of this conversation. The qualitative approach proved confirming, stimulating, revealing, and challenging in spite of acknowledgement that this process does not provide an entirely easy road to define core values.

The Coding Process

Scientific methodology provided a means to create a hybrid of grounded and value theories. Value theory words—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic—were borrowed to

² Ibid.

provide form and definition in the coding process. However, grounded theory alone may not give enough definition for most churches to engage in this soul-searching work and may err on the side of consensus. With use of the puzzle metaphor in chapter 4 to describe this process, the open coding process of sorting systemic values, such as worship, mission, teaching, or Scripture, caused little difficulty, as did launching into the second level of coding, extrinsic property lists, to assure data pieces had been adequately retrieved to move into the critical third step of the process, the actual defining of intrinsic core values. The extrinsic property lists allowed for testing the views of the focus groups alongside Scripture, history, and theology.

Minor difficulties emerged in the first two phases of coding, for transcripts could be labeled with multiple concepts. The solution was to acknowledge that to be the case and move on. Actually, few “pure” concepts could be limited to only one label or area of worth, since most value qualities are multivalent. Acknowledging this aspect of values limits needless over-analysis of what property belongs to what category or how to code a particular piece of transcript. This practice reduces the temptation in most church settings of expending energy with little forward movement. Furthermore, personality types do emerge in the coding process: those who think systemically, extrinsically, or intrinsically; those who are thinkers or feelers, sensitive or intuitive. In such situations, the pastor must patiently lead coders through the process.

The area that required much patience and proved the most problematic was the transition to the staff-parish subcommittee responsible for composing the initial value statements. The qualitative process proved to be a stumbling block for the writing team. If it were merely a process of assembling numbers and prescribing dominant features, the

team probably would have had a much simpler task. However, because some stories were contradictory, nuance and gray areas required interpretation and negotiation. Areas of deficiency were uncovered and recognized. The team was forced to admit that some of the church's perceived strengths may not be as important as originally thought.

Consequently, the team struggled with whether these concepts should appear on our value list, initially questioning whether composing a definitive or distinctive (i.e., intrinsic) set of core values was possible. As a solution, the team developed two lists: core values and emergent needs areas (see chapter 5).

In the midst of this struggle this researcher consoled himself that herein lies the true strength of the process: actually grappling with deep human feelings in the construction of the value statement was the true ultimate goal. We did not seek a cold set of statistics, nor a fanciful list of aspirations, but the grit of realistic church life. We developed a core value statement that also included areas of need. *We did not anticipate these outcomes at first; but defining areas of need has become one of the most significant findings. The unique coding process, especially of extrinsic properties, allowed discovery of the need areas.* Evangel Heights will be looking more concertedly at such areas as stewardship, grace, hospitality, and celebration and allow the findings of this research study to positively enhance the future of the church. Instead of idealized descriptions of church and community, intended to entice the brightest and best, honest statements of church values and needs that are incorporated into the church profile provide reliable analysis of ministry and needs remarkably refreshing to the appointment process of the United Methodist Church.

Intrinsic values do, however, prove elusive. Our attempts at making our statement *strikingly unique* fell short of expectation. But reflection on this expectation proves helpful. In many ways Evangel Heights has not distinguished itself in ministry within the larger Michiana community. Some would vehemently disagree with this provocative statement. One noteworthy exception, however, the core value of searching, emerged. When the sub-committee considered implications of how potentially different this value is at Evangel Heights from other churches that are not so tolerant of diverse opinion or appreciate the spiritual searching process in discipleship, of all the core values, this one stood out. If searching is a true distinction of the church, then it should be flaunted. To be clear, neither this nor any other listed value is perfectly expressed through the life of the church. Nonetheless, the value list signifies the strongest identity characteristics at this time.

No central focus, except education, was discernible in responses generated by the questionnaire. Other than that, no clear picture or story emerged. Distinctive ministries are apparent, but the larger church feels little ownership of these ministries. Distinctive examples are the Ghana mission team, Parents Day Out, and the Lamb Ministry. The Ghana mission is primarily the calling of one person rather than the entire church. Though supportive, most members are more inclined to attribute the Ghana work to a special team than to the effort of the entire church. Similarly, the Parents Day Out is hardly recognized by most as a mission of the church. In fact, few pastors even visited the programs or classrooms over the years. The teaching staff of this ministry was amazed that the pastor took any interest at all in their work to attend their programs, the first pastor to do so in more than fifteen years, according to long-term teachers. The new

Lamb Ministry, still seen to a degree as a new idea from the new pastor, is carefully being groomed as a hallmark of Evangel Heights. Any of these ministries could be illustrative of certain intrinsic values, but they lack the stamp or branding that can be identified as “Evangel Heights.” This problem was fully recognized by the staff-parish committee and will be reviewed by the entire church. It has already been shared with the church staff, who contend that this conclusion diminishes the power of the value that the church is “a family.”

Having perceptions of their own friendliness and warmth could describe potentially dozens of churches in the Michiana area as well as Evangel Heights. Although the subcommittee struggled to include a hospitality value in the statement, it was convinced that we had ample evidence to the contrary. Not that Evangel Heights is unfriendly, but more noteworthy is the freedom the church allows each individual. Thus the conversations behind the scene centered more individuality, freedom, searching, and changed lives. For example, this comment in focus group eight touches on all four of these themes:

TC: This week as I was driving, I was thinking about when I was sitting here last week talking about how the church is in some kind of business. But any way, the business of Christ. I had this idea that came to me that the church is in this business of changing lives. Then we would probably welcome that gay person, because we are in the business of changing lives.

But even here limits to what the church will tolerate are so predictable that revealing the core value statement to the larger congregation will require numerous interpretive conversations. The context for this study will most assuredly rise to that challenge, but it will necessitate reliance on the heart of Evangel Heights’ core values, education.

However, because education, in this context, cannot be packaged, there must be room for

flexibility, discussion, and testing. This need for flexibility may, in part, explain why packaged programs such as T-Net and even Disciple, to a certain extent, do not fit the profile for this church.

As a result, the staff-parish committee will continue to work with the precise rendering of the core value statements until it is ready to turn over the core value statement and entire church profile document to the ownership of the church through its administrative and leadership systems. At the very least, we can say we have taken a healthy, honest look at ourselves in comparison to the biblical, historical, and theological record of the church. The contextual team and staff-parish committee, nonetheless, feel exceedingly satisfied that we have laid a foundation for other churches to build on our experiences. The committee also understands their work with vivid clarity, almost a sense of mandate from the congregation now that they operate from a growing sense of validated core values, not just their own feelings. This recognition alone is a boon for the staff-parish members.

Reflections on the Preaching Series

People responded well to the series. A church replicating this process may consider other possibilities of communicating core values, but this pastor would be hard pressed to consider any other approach than a preaching series (a possible exception being a leadership retreat). Preaching exposes the entire congregation to core value concepts through Scripture and the message. Considerable latitude may be exercised in the Scriptures selected, the illustrations presented, and the overall outline. Other local churches may significantly differ from the Evangel Heights' context, necessitating

different message materials. Whatever the design, if the faith community remains true to the historical record, the experience of God, and the recording of that experience in the biblical record, it can locate its foundation of core values. When the Twelve faced the food distribution crisis, they directly applied known scriptural core values to that experience. When Josiah faced the Asherah poles, he directly applied Scripture to his intervention. When Luther attacked the indulgence system, he directly appealed to Scripture. *Scripture unlocks church core values. And the preached word is the most direct, public, and widest experience of the church to begin the reflection process.* We caution that the process be open for people to experience, wrestle with, and discover these values or it will be, as Luke Timothy Johnson warned, an experience in which we merely return to our daily existence as if nothing happened. Although some parishioners prefer a unilateral expression of core values from the pulpit, this pastor prefers a collegial approach that invites ample response and reflection—a process discovered to be entirely consistent with the core values of Evangel Heights Church.

The Dilemma of Two Contexts

We have reserved commentary on one important issue until the end. This research took place at two locations. The implementation took place at Evangel Heights; but an earlier context, The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana, experienced the advent of this project. An appointment change occurred mid-stream. Even though Evangel Heights had not experienced the foundational work, this pastor got to know the church at a deeper level and more quickly because of this process. The project proved to be an opportunity to discover the South Bend community and the

Evangel Heights congregation at a deeper level than otherwise would have been possible. The discipline of contextual analysis learned in the first context proved to be invaluable in the second. In fact, this discipline would be highly encouraged for any pastor entering any appointment.

Both teams enthusiastically assisted the researcher in the project. The Good Shepherd team studied background materials and entered into Bible study on numerous occasions to build a philosophical understanding of the nature of this project as it could impact the church and the denomination. The first team, engaged in the work as an adventure, was greatly disappointed when the study recessed for a time. Ironically, leaving the program assured the success of this project in its current form, since Good Shepherd, with four preaching pastors, would not have allowed an associate pastor to have access to the pulpit for eight weeks. We learned at Good Shepherd that this project dictates the senior pastor lead in core value clarification. Nonetheless, Good Shepherd has issued an invitation to return there to teach this methodology of value clarification.

The appointment to Evangel Heights provided a laboratory filled with the essentials to carry out the remainder of this research. The appointment experience confirmed what this pastor has known and what the Good Shepherd contextual team learned—the lack of core values is widespread, not isolated. Ordinarily a change in venue is not advised in a doctoral program, but in this case, the re-appointment became iconic.

The contextual team at Evangel Heights was extraordinarily helpful behind the scene: setting up focus groups, transcribing tapes, collating survey results, and assisting with coding. Overwhelming and generous as this support was, feelings lingered as to whether the team was somewhat detached from the roots of the project. The group had

not wrestled with the foundational documents. They had not struggled to find materials and sources related to church values. They had not participated in lengthy Bible studies that resulted in some of the sermon materials. But the results led increasing numbers in the congregation to realize that understanding core values will result in a healthier church, a byproduct of this research the pastor has privately believed but wanted the church to discover on their own. In this growing sense of church health there is growing joy. This project could not have been accomplished without the work of the contextual team.

Given South Bend's demographic, this project took on increasingly academic overtones. Unlike the initial contextual team, the current team had members familiar with research and academic protocols. The Evangel Heights team was more equipped to deal with the second half of this project than the first team. Given the propensity to value individual endeavor in the church, members commonly questioned, "How's your dissertation?" Grateful for the prayers and inquiries, this researcher nevertheless suspected that comments such as these signaled a potential disconnect between the research and the person in the pew that would have been more evident had the church experienced the full range of work. Continued work with core values should overcome this gap. Perhaps we aim too high in our idealism.

Skepticism

Skepticism held that idealism in check, especially among the staff-parish members who had witnessed their fair share of appointments. Attitudes prevail that the local United Methodist Church can do very little to affect the appointment of a pastor.

The relationship between local church and denomination has become defined by an “us and them” attitude, especially with churches that have seen decline that has been blamed, directly or indirectly, on the appointment process. This sense of loss sets up an attitude of resentment, “Well, who are *they* going to send us this time?” This project, however, allowed the staff-parish committee to feel direct involvement in the process at a time when they were not pressed into a corner to make a decision. The committee could intelligently and patiently reflect on core values and could decisively speak to the nature and identity of the church beyond personal feelings and perceptions. This freedom became a huge wellspring of excitement at the conclusion of this research.

One question was voiced, “Why put the staff-parish committee in the central role of writing the core value statement?” The answer: the disciplinary role and expectation of the staff-parish committee is to communicate the core values to the district superintendent and the incoming pastor. Because the district superintendent neither sits down with the church council nor meets with the charge conference or congregation for purposes of making appointments, the staff-parish committee should have a full grasp of core values and be able to articulate them at a moment’s notice. Achieving this end required a fair amount of conversation with the committee members over time so that this work could potentially lead to anything beneficial. Fortunately, the committee had already witnessed the beneficial results of limited and unofficial polling of the congregation in the most recent appointment process. This endeavor proved to be the cornerstone that allowed the project to proceed unimpeded.

Some concern remained whether the core value statement would actually be useful in the hands of the district superintendent. Staff-parish members expressed

lingering skepticism that the cabinet would pay any attention to the work. This attitude signifies the depth of the breach in trust between some churches and the appointment process. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful that developing of core value statements and opening a long term process of communicating them to the district superintendent will help to rebuild that trust.

Skepticism played a part at the cabinet meeting during a presentation of this project. Recalling churches' lack a realistic understanding about themselves expressed in their church profiles, district superintendents believed it imperative that this process be open and honest. District superintendents asserted that if a church can openly admit its needs in certain areas, they would be encouraged to seek a pastor who can address those needs. The same comment was made by a member of the staff-parish committee, "If we have honestly identified core-value-need areas of the church, we can appeal to the conference to send us someone who can help us with our overall mission in these areas, in addition to one who might share certain of our core value strengths." This statement shows a deeper and more mature understanding than what Adair Lummis discovered: she said most needs expressed by the staff-parish committees tend to reflect the deficiencies of the past pastor, not the needs of the church. This work reveals both core value strengths and need areas and has spawned an attitude shift among the members of the staff-parish committee. This positive change should be evident to the district superintendent in future meetings and alleviate some of committee's skepticism.

Research In Context

Care should be taken to explore core values in the midst of ongoing church life, but not get lost in the hubbub of church life. The traditional life of the church continues in the midst of research. In fact, the researcher needs to allow the traditions and seasonal expectations to become part of the story from which to identify core values. Theissen, Meeks, and Johnson suggest the power of symbol, experience, and tradition as the heart of core values. Any attempt to “clean the slate” *in order* to identify core values is a futile effort and denies the very definition of core value identity—the only exception being a presenting catastrophe or religious experience that re-orders the life of a congregation. The power of core value identity begins with understanding reality, in all its inconsistencies and sin. The challenge is to carve away perceptions and aspirations to reach that reality. If any slate-cleaning takes place it should occur afterward and with a different process than what is presented in this work.

In the meeting with the North Indiana Conference Cabinet, this critical question of changing core values was raised, “If you discover a core value that needs to be changed, especially one inconsistent with Scripture, how do you change it?” We can appreciate this question more now than when it was first asked. Though this problem falls outside the purview of this project, a critical lead in answering this question may have been offered. If we were to look at the Jerusalem Council, Luther, Wesley, and Bonhoeffer, witness a common thread of personal or corporate transformative experience. A combination of personal experience and Scripture weigh heavily throughout core value changes in history. A closer look would be required to see if such changes in modern-day

churches are actual transformations of core values, or, as may have been the case in Josiah's reform and suspect in Joshua's covenant renewal, merely window dressing.

Regardless, the process of value discernment, while conducted in the midst of ongoing church life, must also be elevated to central importance and cannot dissolve into another program in a long history of programs of the church. If a value statement is to have life and breath, it must be lived out, and not be relegated to a short-term preaching series that does not connect in any other way to the life of the church. That charge is more difficult than it sounds. Lent, Easter, confirmation, and, in the case of Evangel Heights, a complete makeover of Fellowship Hall, a mortgage burning, a visit by the bishop, an African Mission Team send-off called for headline attention and energy, as it should. Keeping the general church posted on the progress in the doctoral program in the midst of such significant church events was a struggle. The timing constraints of the doctoral program were unavoidable, but a project such as this ought to be conducted sensitive to the overall flow of church life. Overlaying a doctoral program upon the living engine of a church requires a balancing act. A church choosing to engage in a similar study process would do well not to schedule it concurrent with other anticipated significant events, thus allowing the study centrality, but also allowing the traditions and church perceptions to emerge from the shadows to be tested.

The Focus Groups

The focus group becomes the testing ground that allows individuals to express their thoughts and feelings freely, as long as questions are constructed to elicit honest responses and facilitators do not become defensive. We believe we succeeded at these

aims. The focus group concept was so successful that it will be used to meet other emerging needs of the church. The process opened the door to many persons to express their opinions relating on a wide range of topics in a non-threatening way. Several times during the process individuals commented on how important their opinions were to the process and that, for the first time, they sensed they were being heard. In some ways this project was an extension of the Vision 2020 process begun in the fall season prior to this work. Unlike the Vision 2020 process that occurred in a relaxed atmosphere in homes, the doctoral process was much more formal. Had the home format not already been used, it might have been used for the focus groups.

Creating an open environment where as many as twenty-four people could share their views in a period of one hour proved difficult. However, the facilitators addressed this issue and worked hard to have everyone participate. Although a small group/large group mix within the hour was considered, it was discarded as unwieldy because that configuration would have created as many as six “mini focus groups” each Sunday, all needing recording, multiplied by eight Sunday morning sessions. After two weeks we ascertained that the original structure of the focus groups would produce more than sufficient information to do our work.

Another, more serious, challenge developed from the taping. With the number of persons participating and the volume of voices so variable, at times voices could not be heard clearly or identified by the transcriber. The field notes aided the transcriber to a degree, but he was forced to coax the group to speak louder at the beginning of the third session. We also decided at this point to add a second taping system for backup.

What Could Have Been Done Differently

If this study and its method were replicated, two glaring absences or deficiencies should be addressed. First, we could have been more proactive in getting youth involved with the process. Although a representative cross section of the church is represented in the various focus groups, no one under the age of twenty-one participated. Nearly all of the adult youth group leaders participated in at least one or all of the Sunday morning focus groups, but not their constituency in the youth group itself. This vast area of untapped information will need to be addressed and corrected. Youth should be intentionally incorporated into the process.

Our Saturday focus group facilitator commented on a similar problem of inadequate diversity with predominantly older adults. In his debriefing, he commented about the group, “There didn’t appear to be a strong value on connecting with, or reaching out to, the church’s immediate community. Change or risk-taking, predictably, didn’t appear to be greatly valued either. My one concern about my part of the process is that the group I met with tended to be pretty much a homogenous cohort in terms of age and length of membership tenure.”³ This observation, combined with the one concerning youth, mandates an intentional *blending* of older and more youthful voices.

Changes to the Survey

A second change needs to be considered. Although 140 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, only forty-seven were returned, far fewer than anticipated. The combination survey/questionnaire may have been overwhelming. Also, questions

³ Ed Fenstermacher, personal letter, 13 March 2006. Fenstermacher is the Associate Director of Church Development, North Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.

arose about how to answer the survey: from a personal perspective, from the perspective of what the individual preferred the church to be ideally, or from the perspective of the where church really is now. Several questions in this area we spoke to in chapter 5.

At one point, in an attempt to elicit more responses, a new set of instructions went out to a series of Sunday and Bible study classes in the church, encouraging them to “feel free to work on either the survey or the questionnaire if you do not have time to do both.” Even though this reassurance brought a ripple of relief it did not produce more response than before. Fortunately, we did not have to depend entirely upon the surveys or questionnaires.

If we had wanted to capture more information from a wider number of people, we could have conducted a much simpler mini-survey or questionnaire *each week* on the particular theme of the week. This approach might have solved some problems because it would have given the broader church weekly access to the process of recording their thoughts on core values, similar to the focus group responses. If this type of work is repeated, the weekly feedback will probably be used.

Personal Change and Impact

Value identification for church and pastor run parallel tracks. Both have undergone significant change. Even though this pastor has worked with a personal mission statement for several years, “Delivering a message of hope,” this pastor has been no better than most of the churches served in being steadfastly and totally guided by that statement. Gut feelings have steered most pastoral work. At no point in ministry, other than ordination processes, has anyone inquired into personal core values. No doubt

forgotten chapters of books, and prophetic voices in seminary valiantly proclaimed the importance of core values, but these messages were not clearly defined and ordered. Obviously a pastor cannot make ministry decisions without a deep understanding of core values, nor can one move through life without some semblance of core values, but to articulate them is another matter. As a result of the close examination required by this study, personal values now are more operational, clearer, and more specific, as follows:

- The proclamation of a hope-filled future with God.
- The universal and continuous offer of God's love and grace through Christ.
- The creative use of Scripture in all teaching, from pulpit to classroom.
- Patience with each individual's journey toward living as Christ's disciple in the midst of the human propensity to question, doubt, and struggle with God's Word and will.
- The Holy Spirit's work within each individual to create a unique member of the Body of Christ, called to service and mission within the Kingdom of God.
- The work of the church as the proleptic presence of God's Kingdom within and interacting with the world community.
- Appreciation of worship, regardless of style or format.

Writing such a statement has led to a deeper understanding of the pastoral self in its various manifestations in relation to the church: leadership style, personality, personal goals and values. More work is required here.⁴

The Hartman Profile

In addition to being a major component in the development of the personal value statement, the Hartman Profile revealed qualities of work and lifestyle values. The two

⁴ Samuel D. Rima's *Leading from the Inside Out*, referred to in chapter 2, provides guidance in the process of personal core values.

parts to the Hartman Profile require evaluating how one views the outer world and work and how one views internal self and self-regard. Ranking two lists of eighteen concepts generated volumes of diagnostic material that indicated strong development and consistency. Only three of thirty-two areas ranked “moderate”: dealing with difficult people, dealing with change, and being too hard on the self. This information accurately confirms long held feelings and insecurities.

Familiarity with value theory language—intrinsic, extrinsic, and systemic values—reveals that the Hartman Profile uses many additional concepts and combinations of these concepts to capture an understanding of the individual. The strongest personal scores related to the extrinsic scales measuring the capacity to understand practical and pragmatic processes and to see solutions to problems. Other scores on this profile indicated a balanced orientation between realistic (the way things are) and idealistic (the ways things should be) understandings of work. Strong scores in the ability to see what is more relevant in complex situations, ability to process and synthesize information and carefully evaluate it, signify a weakness that allows shutting people out concentrate on tasks or projects. That trait, too, is consistent with life experience and certainly was evident during research. This observation calls attention to consistent struggles to balance time and energy during the doctoral program.

The Hartman Profile essentially creates a fulcrum to understand the balance between work life and personal life. Comparing both sides of the equation helps individuals determine whether they have sufficient balance between attention given to external responsibilities and attention given to self. The potential differences between the two scores, the view to work versus the view to self, make one wonder if similar

observations could be made of churches. A church could potentially measure feelings concerning itself, internal workings, and pietistic expressions versus the work it undertakes to meet the needs of the world, mission, and evangelism. A church could possibly determine tendencies toward legalism versus grace. If the Hartman Profile could be modified to address group interaction in addition to individual lifestyle, it could create a fascinating study.

Personal Change Survey

This researcher also engaged in two additional personal surveys through *Percept*.⁵ The first survey, “ichange,”⁶ assesses an individual’s ability and openness to change. This survey gives respondents an opportunity to gauge themselves on a continuum ranging from “derailing, blocking, and tentative, to engaged and reckless.” Derailing is defined: “I generally like things the way they are and often find myself working to keep them that way. If you want to start changing things, I’m not afraid to challenge you.” On the other end of the spectrum, reckless agents believe, “I think change itself is a great thing. It keeps things interesting. Other people should be more open to seeing how things could be done differently.” And in the middle, tentative is described: “When things start to change, I find myself feeling uncertain. I’m not really against the changes, but often they make me feel uneasy. I worry about what things will be like after the change. I don’t cause trouble, but I don’t lead the charge either.” On this scale, this pastor scored a “tentative” style, an accurate description. However, change in church context produced changes in

⁵ *Percept* provides extensive faith based demographic materials to churches and leadership support for pastors on a subscription basis.

⁶ “ichange Survey,” *Percept*, <http://www.link2lead.com/L2L/MySelf/iChange/guess.asp> (accessed August 20, 2003).

the evaluation. In the Good Shepherd context, a church that exemplified a state of constant change, this pastor embodied a markedly tentative style. However in the Evangel Heights context, a greater tendency toward “engaged” emerged described in this way, “While I’m not necessarily excited by change for change’s sake, I believe there is opportunity in change and I try to be proactive in engaging the challenges of a changing environment.” This pastor does not agree entirely with the definitions offered by Percept which appear mostly negative. Given the limitations of any instrument, this profile does offer insights into personal tendencies.

Personal Leadership Style Survey

The second Percept survey, “ilead,”⁷ relates to leadership style, identifying four essential types: pastor, poet, apostle, and prophet. Percept acknowledges two additional types of leaders, administrator and evangelist, but this survey concentrates on the four essential types mentioned. The pastor and apostle are considered as realists (action-oriented), the poet and prophet are referred to as idealists (reflection-oriented), the pastor and poet are referred to as leaders with an inward emphasis (people-oriented), and the apostle and prophets are referred to as leaders with an outward focus (principle-oriented). Although these definitions may be too limited, the results indicated a primary lead type of a poet, with a secondary lead type as pastor which is defined by Percept as a balanced idealistic/realistic leadership style with an inward, or people-oriented focus. This assessment corroborates the findings of the Hartman Profile. Personally, tremendous

⁷ “ilead Survey,” *Percept*, <http://www.link2lead.com/L2L/MySelf/ileadtype.results.asp> (accessed August 20, 2003).

growth has taken place with the development of a personal core value statement, psychological understanding, and leadership style.

For Future Study

The appointment process for United Methodists provides huge potential for future study. This study explores only one small slice of the work of the staff-parish committee's use of core values. The role of the district superintendents,⁸ bishops, and pastor can also be studied in the appointment process. Other lenses can also be used to look at the work of the staff-parish committee and appointments. For example, the Hartman Profile could enable understanding of the make-up of the church and committee and their understanding of values. Although the Hartman Profile is geared to analyze how an individual works and understands personal life and does not differentiate specific values related to missions, worship, evangelism, and the like, it would provide a different view of the appointment process. Because it is a simple test that takes only thirty minutes to complete, the conference should investigate making the Hartman Profile available to all pastors, even though the interpretation phase takes time and would incur expense.

In addition to core values, the appointment process can be investigated through an entirely different lens, a personality profile that offers a different dimension to understanding the selection of a pastor for a church. Well known tools, from the Meyer's-Briggs inventory to the similar Keirsey Temperament Sorter,⁹ are widely available. As is

⁸ Julian Aldridge, "A Connected Laity for an Empowered Church: Maximizing the Role of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee" (D. Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 1991), promotes the use of district superintendents to train and supervise leaders of the pastor-parish relations committee.

⁹ David Keirsey, *Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence*, (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1998).

apparent in this study, whatever issues exist for pastors also exist for churches. Either of these tools discover “extroverted” churches and “introverted” churches, churches more adept at feeling versus thinking, or more intuitive than sensing. These findings could be compared to the pastor’s personality. Surely such type matching has a part to play in the appointment process. Personality profiles are already generated as a part of the ordination process; perhaps they could be reviewed during the appointment process.

The Alban Institute conducts ongoing research on the effects of educational background and economic pressures on churches related to the appointment or call of a pastor in rural versus urban settings. Duke University is currently working with Medco, in the healthcare industry, to determine the relationship between spiritual and physical wellness. These findings could yield another study interfacing with the appointment process. Continued work in the area of what *influences* choice of pastor by either call committees or staff-parish committees is needed if the average church seeks to move beyond maintenance to actively living out its call (beyond that of fellowship within the faith community). A huge assumption exists, however, that churches *value or even desire* active involvement with the larger community.

Pressures impinge upon the staff-parish committee in the appointment process, just as they do on the cabinet. In the local church community political power and authority issues surface in conflicts between the value structure held by the members of the staff-parish committee and the wider church. Internal power brokers may hold the rest of the church hostage to their own agendas and values, bizarre as this may seem.

After the discovery of core values, another field of study opens beyond the appointment process. Studies can be conducted to determine the relationship between

core values and staff evaluations, between use of time and resources. The staff-parish committee could use codified core values to implement effective evaluations by assuring, for example, staff members have promoted, advanced, and lived out their work in relationship to the core values of the church. Using core values in this way could eliminate the struggle most staff-parish committees face with criteria, method, and frequency of staff evaluations. A solid understanding of core values begins to address some of those concerns, and at the least, establishes a beginning point against which to compare performance, attitudes, and effective working relationships.

Research could also be conducted to show how core values impact the goal-setting process of a church in the area of general hiring or implementing new ministries with volunteers. However, a relationship between core values and the vision, goals, and strategy of a church would have to be established, as well as ways to test the effectiveness of certain ministries, based on the strength of particular values. In addition, discovering whether a correlation exists between the strength of a particular value and its success or failure offers many research opportunities.

For Evangel Heights, the value statement will have a far-ranging impact. Not only will the statement influence the appointment process, but it will be used in staff meetings for planning, be the focal point of the annual church leadership summits to direct future goal-setting by the various work areas of the church, help prioritize decisions and choices, establish staff members' working protocols and time usage, provide a tool to evaluate staff and ministries, reach into the worship and community life of the church by inspiring vision and action, and play a central role in new membership classes. Already, staff members refer to the initial core value statement for guidance in weekly decision *

making. This statement will become a powerful tool for the future of Evangel Heights Church.

Conclusions

It is too early to tell precisely what changes have occurred because of this project. Overall, the church certainly had a good experience with the process. The full impact of the value statement in regard to appointment will not be experienced until the next appointment of a new pastor. In the mean time, the value statement will continue to go through a codification process. The staff-parish committee registered positive feelings for they believe the value statement forms the basis for discussion with the district superintendent during the take-out session and more informed questions of the pastor during the take-in session. As weak areas are addressed, certain core values should be amended and others added. As the core values move center stage for the entire church, they will also begin to impact evaluations and direction of church ministry. Beyond this summary are several additional conclusions.

First, although the prominent feature of this project has been descriptive, it has not been passive. Participants and organizers in the process have experienced the hard work that goes into attempting to understand and articulate a set of core values. Starting a new business or church and gathering the core leaders to establish a set of core values upon which a new entity is neither simple nor easy, but that process is less demanding than major remodeling and rebuilding. Each person involved in new building brings a set of personal values to the leadership table as excitement and a sense of starting something new permeates that type of experience. Taking an existing church with a long history and

experience of merger and deciphering core values, some which lie latent, is quite another story. We discovered what we thought we felt about the church all along was not entirely accurate. Discoveries led to surprise, wrestling, a re-thinking of what was assumed, thereby requiring a new look at the identity of the church. This action is healthy and would not have been possible without the focus group approach. People disagreed with one other and came to realize different perceptions. This struggle was not a passive process on the part of the congregation. They encountered difficult issues in the course of discovering core values, did not necessarily resolve them, but certainly accepted them as belonging to the life of the congregation. The focus groups were at the very least lively, and sometimes adversarial. Furthermore, the contextual team and the staff-parish committee quickly realized that the difficulty of identifying core values required depth to explore the transcripts as the treasure trove of core values. This was no easy task. Though some values were observed quickly, others were not so easy and took time and prayer to become clear. No doubt over the next six to twelve months, the core value statement will also become clearer yet.

Second, the feelings of all who have participated in this project have been acknowledged. Without question, a qualitative analysis of church core values delineated nuances in feelings and differentiated a true core value from an aspiration. An entirely quantitative process might have given similar results in our basic statement, but it would never have yielded the rich tapestry of feelings and textures that will carry us forward in our future work. As an added benefit, the qualitative process, especially through the lens of value theory, underscored areas of weaknesses in each of the value areas. Because no single value area is perfect or pure, certain value areas need more support, reinforcement,

and work than others. This knowledge has become one of the most powerful benefits of this project. To know that the church aspires to hospitality, but that significant stories contradict that value area, will help Evangel Heights gain a proper perspective on what is truly valued and what has even grown to mythical proportions. A church does not live only by its values; it lives by its myths (a word that can have both positive and negative connotations). So often the district superintendent, not knowing differently, accepts self-described myths contained in a church profile and passes those along to an incoming pastor. Certainly everyone desires to place the church's best foot forward at a meeting, but it would be better, given the brevity of the process, to see an accurate picture.

Third, core values need continually to be rehearsed, renewed, and refined, or else a church and, consequently, the staff-parish committee will begin the gradual, and all-too-human process of sliding away from the church's purpose and identity. If a pastoral change occurs in a period defined by uncertainty, the staff-parish committee may reflect that distorted image or confusion in the appointment process. This scenario is a familiar one. Members and leaders innocently, bit by bit, are drawn away from "what is of first importance," according to Paul. Paul's letters, the covenant renewal at Shechem by Joshua, the shocking need for reformation by Josiah—all point to one lesson: we cannot rest on our laurels. Not only with each new generation, but with each passing season and experience, we need a constant reminder of central core values. Creeds were developed to help in this process. The *Shema* of the Old Testament, and all other identity-defining and faith-guiding experiences point to one thing: keeping first things first by rehearsing the faith community.

Not only is rehearsing needed, but renewal also. Much like Joshua's experience, intrusions in life create possibilities for wandering. Rehearsal is fine, but commitment is essential for people to truly engage in the work of ministry. They must have access to the core values, experience them as defining practices and habits of their church community and themselves individually, and intentionally incorporate them into their own personal lives and the corporate life of the church in order to effect spiritual renewal. To renew, they must answer the call to commitment by applying a specific core value to individual conduct or a ministry concept or idea. When a new ministry begins in a church, a perfect opportunity arises to renew the core value statement addressed in the new ministry area. In other words, "Here is something new we are doing at church, and this is how it connects to our core values." Likewise, new people constantly come into the life of a church; new member classes afford another opportunity for renewing the core values of the church. Liturgically speaking, when baptisms, confirmations or membership vows are taken, the renewal response of the congregation should remind them of core values. Overlooked in this renewal process is the appointment and arrival of a new pastor.

Not only should core values be rehearsed and renewed, they should also be refined. Even though there is a lasting quality to core values, earth shaking, even divine, encounters take place that may call values into question. The members of the Jerusalem Council in Acts discovered this truth. When the covenantal sign of circumcision was questioned, the Pharisee Gamaliel spoke wise words to all through the ages: "... if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."¹⁰ Obviously the outcome Gamaliel predicted brought about a profound theological change that the

¹⁰ Acts 5:38-39.

church worked through, but some churches may suddenly find themselves struggling for survival for drastically different reasons. Hurricane Katrina work teams have returned to Evangel Heights, reporting how the identities and roles of some churches have radically altered in the wake of unimaginable crisis. In such catastrophes, disputes concerning styles of worship simply cease to be important. Churches involved in life or death battles can have their DNA permanently altered. The winds of revival may blow through a congregation, creating a whole new outlook on mission and evangelism. In the case of World War II, core value changes were not necessarily always positive. *Ultimately, however, core values need be owned, understood, articulated and rehearsed by the entire body.*

Fourth, one cannot engage in a discovery of core values for a church or other entity without the pastor, and each member, also engaging in similar self-discovery. The process of value discovery is not a detached process for the researcher. When the researcher is the appointed pastor, the role of the researcher cannot always be that of an unimpassioned observer. Indeed, at times, the researcher only observed as the church membership took their opportunity to speak. Pastoral intrusion could have caused this project to become nothing less than a personal value statement imposed on the church by the pastor. (And in some churches this is precisely what the value statement is.) Without casting judgment, both church and pastor must recognize differing value systems to derive at common core values. The personal discovery of the pastor, requiring active wrestling with values, must be taken into account. In the actual appointment process, a staff-parish committee that has wrestled with core values can quickly discern an incoming pastor who has not. Furthermore, if the pastor lacks clarity concerning core

values, he or she cannot decisively know areas of agreement or conflict and will simply rely on feeling or hunches, like many non-discerning staff-parish committees.

Fifth, church core values are not discovered through a process of consensus, but through a process of synthesizing personal views with the biblical, historical record. *The resurrected Christ and the faithful legacy of Christ's followers establish the unique identity of the church over the ages.* Nevertheless, the faith community has fallen prey to temptations, chasing after other gods, grasping for power and control, or political recognition. Both biblical and historical records amply evidence these shortcomings, along with the heresies that theologically justify the beliefs and decisions that motivate them and dominate the mainstream of thinking. Because one is thinking in the mainstream does not automatically make for good theology. No doubt one of the “evil” kings of the Old Testament, Arias during the development of the creeds, and Maier of the Lutheran Reformation thought they were more than justified, biblically and theologically, in their thinking. In contrast, the prophets and reformers were the distant, lonely voices. In any search for core values, one must look not only to the mainstream but also to the fringes to make sure God is receiving a proper hearing. Instead of striving for pure consensus, the development of a church core value statement is more of a “coming to terms” with the biblical, historical, theological record as it is expressed in a particular locale.

Sixth, itineracy provides a notable example of an ideal that has been “hijacked,” as was suggested in chapters 2 and 3 earlier, to incorporate worldly values instead of the historical purposes of spreading scriptural holiness, mission, and evangelism. If itineracy serves only to maintain churches of which 43 percent do not receive any new members

by confession of faith and another 31 percent receive fewer than five in a year (detailed in chapter 2, footnote 8), then itineracy has miserably failed its purpose in the modern era. Such failure of mission and purpose demands core values from the divine Source. Many call for change at the denominational level, but a commensurate change must occur at the local church level and with the staff-parish committee to address this core value crisis. While many authors focus their attention at the denominational level, Evangel Heights has initiated change at the local level with this project.

Finally, the whole purpose for this project is to encourage a positive change in the appointment process by interjecting clear core values. Core values clarity creates an environment for effective pastoral appointment, but many pressures also bear upon the appointment process. Because many of those pressures conflict with the missional core values of the United Methodist Church, the staff-parish committee has been involved in a process of reflecting on the core values articulated by a local church, Evangel Heights, through a qualitative process. As a result the church has begun a continuing process of incorporating core values and their strengths and weaknesses into the church profile. The current staff-parish committee is much more aware of these concepts than they were when they joined this project. It is the prayer of this researcher that more and more staff-parish committees will become aware not only of their local church values, but of the greater movement of the church across the world. What changes will ultimately develop denominationally for the appointment process are yet to be determined, but if the staff-parish committee can articulate their understanding of biblical, historical, and theological core values as they are uniquely expressed through the local church, we will equip the church to meet future needs.

A clear undercurrent runs through conversations with retired bishops to church members that significant changes must occur within the appointment system. By opening a door to more congregational input with the appointment process, the congregation has been stirred to discuss the true nature of the church. One can hope that this discussion will inspire the leadership and the membership to burst into action and seize responsibility for navigating a course guided by true core values. Instead of creating an attitude of entitlement on one hand, or of defeatism on the other, we very intentionally focused our attention on local responsibility in the appointment process. Interestingly, the staff-parish committee, who initially did not feel comfortable in speaking for the whole church, now shows more eagerness to design the future direction of the church. In no way has any disciplinary role of the cabinet been compromised or diminished; instead, the staff-parish committee now perceives itself as empowered and articulate to represent the whole church. The question remains, however, whether denominational leaders will have courage to change the appointment process. Regardless the outcome, Evangel Heights is ready.

GLOSSARY

Appointment: the official placement of a pastor by the bishop in a local congregation.

Axial coding: process by which coded concepts relate to each other in grounded theory.

Bishop: the leader of a geographical area, a conference(s), comprised of districts.

Cabinet: the collection of district superintendents who work alongside the bishop.

Church profile: the document produced primarily by the staff-parish committee describing various characteristics of a church and community.

Coding: a researcher's understanding, interpreting, and labeling of data.

Discipline: the book of rules, guidelines, and orders by which United Methodist Churches are governed.

District superintendent: pastoral leader of a district within a conference typically including about sixty churches. A member of the bishop's cabinet, the key figure in matching pastor with church.

Extrinsic values: the properties or construct of a systemic value.

Intrinsic values: that which makes what is valued singular, personal, or unique.

In vivo: actual words of respondents used to label a concept in the coding process.

Itineracy: free transfer and movement of pastors to meet the needs of a particular conference.

Open coding: initial process by which concepts and categories of ideas are identified.

Proleptic: anticipating and rehearsing God's end-time kingdom already graciously poured into the present by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Saturation: The point at which no new understanding may be added to a concept

Staff-parish committee: the local church committee that consults with the district superintendent during the appointment of a pastor.

Systemic values: the most basic and abstract statement about a concept.

Take-in session: the meeting of the district superintendent, staff parish committee, and newly appointed pastor.

Take-out session: though not a term uniformly used throughout the United Methodist Church, the meeting with the district superintendent, staff parish committee, and a retiring pastor or pastor moving to another church.

Triangulation: conducting research with at least three streams of data for purposes of comparison.

Value theory: the worth of people, concepts, or things.

APPENDIX A

PRE-RESEARCH LOCAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Original Church Profile

Community that surrounds the church: At one time the church location was central to that area of northeast South Bend where a large number of middle and upper management people lived. It is still a strong middle to upper-middle income residential community, but over the past twenty-five years, the executive growth area has been new subdivisions further north and east, into Clay Township and Granger. Yet, even today, Ironwood and Colfax is recognized in South Bend as a good address. If you draw a six-mile circle around the church, it encompasses an area primarily made up of middle and higher priced homes.

The church is surrounded by 5 universities and colleges; including the University of Notre Dame, IUSB and Bethel College. Many faculty and staff live in the surrounding neighborhoods.

We are minutes from two nationally recognized hospitals. The community has a very large physician base, with a nice mix of primary and specialty care.

We are minutes from downtown South Bend, and many attractions are listed in the area highlights below.

The community is extremely well known for its love and support of non-profit entities in the area. Construction is currently being completed right around the corner from the church on the new Logan Center, which is a wonderful facility for youth and adults with physical and mental disabilities. The Center for the Homeless (a nationally recognized center) and Hope Rescue Mission are two other local no-profits that are embraced by the community.

Locally, we are kept informed through a broad range of local radio stations offering NPR, Christian Contemporary, Pop, Adult Contemporary, Classic Rock, Classical, etc. The South Bend Tribune, the local paper, also owns WSBT, which is the local CBS affiliate. The local NBC affiliate, WNDU, is owned by Notre Dame.

School system: The parsonage is located in the South Bend Community School Corporation. John Adams is the feeder high school, and is within walking distance. For many years, Adams had the reputation of being the best high school in the area, in part because of the overall quality of the area. Recently, LaSalle High School was closed, and many of the students were transferred to Adams, which brings a more diverse socio-economic student body. It is in process of completing a total renovation. With the project almost complete, and a new principal making significant progress, the long time reputation seems to be in tact.

McKinley and Jefferson Elementary, and Edison Middle feed into Adams. These are good schools consistent with what you would expect going into Adams. There are also many public and private schools in the area and excellent pre-school and daycare choices. Many families in the area have chosen to home school, as well.

The Parsonage is located . . . in a quiet, established, well maintained neighborhood. The residents are made up of young families and retired professionals. The parsonage meets conference standards.

The congregation covers a full span of age groups. A rough analysis of the most recent pictorial directory would indicate that we have about 30 percent young families with children, 55 percent are sixty and over and the balance is made of younger singles. Due to the size of the congregation and the involvement of many groups in Sunday

School and other activities, most members know each other. This can be seen during our greeting time before and after the 8:45 service. Most visitors believe we are a very friendly church. Many people will introduce themselves to a new face. For the most part, we are a middle of the road people who prefer a traditional brand of Methodism. We are not a very diverse congregation. Most members are professional (or retired from professional careers), intelligent and outgoing. There are many small groups that meet and get together for events outside of the church.

We will be happy to pass on those findings at that time. Our service style is currently traditional, mixed with some praise worship and modern dance. So, we like to add excitement and innovation in our worship. We envision Evangel Heights to be a leader in the community among Methodist Churches. We should be solidly rooted in the tradition of John Wesley, while making services relevant to today's world. This should be the challenge to the right pastor. We want to be a church who pays its apportionments; a church that is looked up to and well respected. We are a church whose tradition of strong leadership can be re-ignited by the right pastor.

Vision 2020 Summary

These are the responses to the questions: “What would make Evangel Heights an exceedingly great church?”

A Church of Spiritual Depth

- Exemplified by 2 Chronicles 7:15 (prayer, seeking, humility)
- Bringing people to Christ, saving souls
- Nurturing constant renewal
- Christ alive in each of our hearts
- Teaching, baptizing and making disciples
- Intentionally building God’s Kingdom
- A praying church
- A tithing church
- Everyone going through Disciple Bible Studies
- Unified focus and strong vision
- Developing spiritual disciplines
- Having prayer partners for each of our children and youth
- A place of worship and rest
- A place for healing

A Church with a Heart for the Community

- Where visitors experience the love of God
- A welcoming and loving church
- A community church where all are welcome
- All inclusive spirit—where young and old alike know what each other is doing, support and care for each other
- Open and accessible church, immediately welcoming new people
- Reaching out to Walnut Grove, Jefferson Manor, Park Jefferson
- Openness to people with disabilities
- Pastor and staff connecting more to Parents Day Out ministry
- Commitment to community missions
- Reaching out to college campuses
- A place where no one falls through the cracks
- A place where people are connected to each other

A Church with a Passion for Worship

- A large choir
- Inspiring music
- Children’s hand bell choir
- Praise team

- Great preaching and strong messages
- A contemporary service
- Reverence for the altar space
- Youth groups more actively involved in worship
- Second service choir expanded
- Bell choir for the Sunshine Class
- Children's Church and wee worship expanded

A Church with Expanding Ministries

- More small group variety
- More involvement by young people
- More proactive planning
- More scholarships to encourage church camp
- Children's ministries to include weeknight outreach, educational, meal, music experience
- Sonseeker—older children/young youth group
- Young adult/singles ministry
- Summer Sunday School for college students
- College student led reunion service
- Increase the size of the congregation
- Men's Bible study group
- Strengthen mission outreach
- Strengthen support for Gongwer mission
- Healing ministry
- Times to honor early generational families
- Intergenerational events
- Tele-care phone ministry for shut-ins
- Web page updated
- Computers and software for children's education
- Challenging studies for adults
- Paid nursery staff

A Church with facilities meeting future needs

- New carpeting for Fellowship Hall
- Air conditioning for Fellowship Hall
- Painting fellowship hall and sanctuary
- Fix dividers in fellowship hall
- Replace all blinds in fellowship hall and classrooms
- New landscaping
- Next phase for building: entryway, drop off, elevator
- Improved sound systems for sanctuary and hall
- Connect nursery and sanctuary with sound and television

- Endowment fund
- Improvements to prayer garden
- Better lighting for parking lot
- New wheelchair accessibility/ramp
- Upgrade all restrooms to accessibility standards
- Improve chapel space, connect to sanctuary with television.
- Renovate basement spaces, storage and cleaning including restrooms and usage of old kitchen
- Improve library and location
- Replace boiler system
- Reconfigure overflow seating for more people
- Replace chairs in fellowship hall
- New, more uniform chairs for education area
- Bus

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH PARTICIPATION DOCUMENTS

Doctor of Ministry Research Participation Form
 Researcher: Pastor Patrick Somers
 Program: Collaborative Program for Preaching:
 United Theological Seminary of Dayton, OH/Crystal Cathedral of Garden Grove, CA
 Research Site: Evangel Heights United Methodist Church
 114 N Ironwood Dr, South Bend, IN 16615

Your Name: _____

Your Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Age: (circle one) 18-30 31-45 46-60 61-75 76+

Are you a member or participant in a church? _____ Where? _____

How long have you been a member or participant in your church? _____

What do you believe to be the most admired and least admired quality(ies) of your church?

In what areas do you spend your time in ministry at your church (if not a member of a church answer according to your community involvements)?

In what areas do you spend time or resources in other ministries outside of your church?

I understand by my participation in this class, focus group or interview, my comments will be recorded. I also understand that some of my comments may be used in the final dissertation, but my identity will be held in confidence. Transcripts of these discussions/interviews will be made available to the Doctor of Ministry Contextual Associates Team for purposes of coding and comparison to other research experiences.

Signature _____ Date _____

* * * * *

Research Purpose only: Participant Number _____ Group Number _____

Date(s) of participation: _____

<p style="text-align: center;">Congregational Questionnaire Discover Evangel Heights' Core Values</p>

1. Where do you invest your time at Evangel Heights? Why?
2. Where do you spend time for God outside of Evangel Heights?
3. What are people within and outside Evangel Heights saying about it?
4. What is it about Evangel Heights that excites you? (What stirs your emotions?)
5. When people brag about Evangel Heights, about what specifically do they brag?
6. What do you admire most about Evangel Heights? Least?
7. Name one or two changes that would make this a better church. What would you not change?
8. If God would make possible one thing for Evangel Heights, what would it be?
9. What is most important to you about Evangel Heights?
10. What do you understand to be Evangel Heights' core values?

Have you participated in any other form of research associated with this project? If so, please describe your involvement:

Church Ministry Values Audit

Use this tool to indicate what you think is important to you at Evangel Heights. First, **RATE** each of the core values below from 1 to 5 (with 5 as the highest). Mark "0" if you have no opinion.

Value	Rating						Rank
1. Godly servant Leadership	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
2. A well-mobilized laity	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
3. Bible-centered preaching/teaching	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
4. The poor and disenfranchised	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
5. Creativity and innovation	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
6. World missions	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
7. All people matter to God	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
8. An attractive facility	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
9. Financial responsibility	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
10. The status quo	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
11. Welcoming Visitors	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
12. Cultural relevance	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
13. Intercessory prayer	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
14. Sustained excellence/quality	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
15. Fellowship/community	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
16. Evangelism	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
17. Strong families	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
18. Adherence to tradition	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
19. Praise and contemporary worship	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
20. Use of modern media	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
21. Prophetic voice for social justice	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
22. Commitment to discipleship/training	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
23. Giving/tithing	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
24. Counseling	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
25. Ethnically/socially diverse congregation	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
26. Christian Education (all ages)	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
27. Local missions	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
28. Spiritual disciplines (i.e. prayer/fasting)	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
29. Youth /Campus outreach	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
30. Spiritual gifts utilized	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
31. Other: _____	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____

For no more than 12 items you have rated either a 4 or 5, use the "RANK" column to indicate which item is most important (1), next important (2), and so on.

Aubrey Malphurs. Adapted from *Values-Driven Leadership*. Used by permission of Baker Books, a division of Baker Book House Company, copyright 1996.

APPENDIX C

“TRUE TO THE CORE” VALUE MESSAGE SERIES

“A Tale of Two Kings”
Matthew 2:1-12 and II Kings 22-23
Preached on January 8, 2006

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. I suppose it all depends on to whom you are talking. If you were a man named Art, you would have thought it was the worst of times.

First Church had steadily grown over a period of five years. Many credited the vision and leadership of the new pastor. This new pastor recalls a time when Art spoke with him before services one Sunday:

Art approached me just as I was about to enter the sanctuary . . . and he was clearly not happy. His face was a suffused red, and his hands were clenching and unclenching.

“Pastor, *you’re* responsible for bringing all these new people into this church! You seem to think all this growth is a good thing. [We’ll I’ll tell you a few things. It’s taken me a while to get used to those screens in the sanctuary. I’m still not sure about those drums up there. But now this; this takes the cake!] There’s somebody parked in my parking spot!”

The pastor thought for a moment—that’s right—Art’s the one who parks under the only shade tree in the entire parking lot. Everybody who’s been a member knows that. And rather than deal with Art, they just let him park there. But some unknowing, unsuspecting newcomer, accidentally parked in his spot. I looked at Art, glanced out at the sanctuary, and then looked at Art again. I sighed and said, “Art, I think you’re going to have a really bad day.” Art looked confused.

“Why is that, pastor?” he responded.

“Because,” I said, “I think they’re also sitting in your pew!”¹

What Art experienced was very important to him. We might not agree with him, but it was important to him. His equilibrium was thrown off. What Art feels might seem unimportant to us, but in the grand scheme of things Art’s experience is symbolic of the power of values.

¹ Story adapted from Kent R. Hunter’s *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up With God’s Vision* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 31.

And, in fact, Art's experience starts us off on a series of messages specifically designed to examine what we believe to be core values at Evangel Heights Church. The discovery of our true core values, *how* we go about discovering them, and the implications for the appointment process of the United Methodist Church is what my Doctor of Ministry project, actually *our* project, is all about.

You will have at least three ways to participate in this research project: through a survey and questionnaire, through a focus group that will meet after the 8:45 service in the Chapel, and an independent focus group conducted by Ed Fenstermacher of our Conference office on Saturday, March 11.

So let's begin! What is a core value? It basically answers the question "Who are we," and "Why do we do what we do?"

- Not "What are we doing?" That's vision
- Not "How do we get there?" That's goal or strategy.

A value "propels" a ministry by defining who we are.²

- We can call it our DNA
- Our identity
- The driving force
- The engine that makes sense of what we are doing

But so often we are unaware of core values until they are challenged. That's what Art experienced. And it is also what Josiah and Herod experienced in the Bible. When the status quo is challenged, when core values come under fire, feathers get ruffled. Core values become hotly contested.

Values are part of our heart and soul. They come from the depths of experience. They are ingrained, strongly felt, but not always clearly understood or articulated.

² Malphurs' *Values-Driven Leadership*, 32-33.

So when it comes to certain values, Art, for instance, was ready for a show-down at the Okay corral. “This town ain’t big enough for the both of us.” The more sinister King Herod attempts sabotage. “I don’t like the way things are going, so I’ll do something about it.” Some people think compromise is the answer. And perhaps in some situations that may be the best. I know of one Presbyterian Church that compromised itself into a box it has to live with for many generations. They built a brand new facility just a few years ago designing their sanctuary, in part, around a 50 year old felt banner.

Don’t laugh too much. Every church has sacred cows that are sometimes laughable to the outsider. Vehemently defended, values determine how people think things should be or ought to be. Sadder yet is the story of one of the most holy of Christian sites in the world: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. I have personally witnessed this mish-mash of inefficiency and mistrust between several Christian bodies: Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox; to name a few. Each group has its own segment of the church, the traditional site of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Who would you believe holds the keys to this facility? For over 800 years the keys to the Sepulchre have been entrusted to two *Muslim* families.³

Values can divide us. We cling to values, whether right or wrong. But values more positively have the power to unite. Values guide and direct our lives. They are the compass. Values go to the depths of our being. We spend our lives in the pursuit of certain values. Values are powerful, beautiful, inspiring, and uniting experiences. Without values there would be no like-mindedness about anything. A group will voluntarily agree to a collection of values because that is what they believe in their heart.

³ The Holy Sepulchre, *Jewish Media and Communication Centre* <http://www.jmcc.org/ptw/2001/Apr/site.htm> (accessed January 4, 2006).

Clubs have core values. Gangs have core values. Companies have core values. Hospitals have core values. Television stations have core values. Churches have values.

What about Evangel Heights? What do we stand for? What are we about?

Identifying core values for the church is not merely a process of consensus. We take our core values from scriptural, theological, and historical foundations.

What makes each church unique in living out those core values is the emphasis, passion, and particular call upon that local church. We cannot be all things to all people, but whatever we do is based upon biblical core values, historically Christian core values, those values unique to United Methodism and John Wesley.

That's what this whole series is about, what makes us "value"-able! We want to be "True to the Core." Core values, that is. Today we'll take a quick look at two kings and the values that make them who they are. The two kings comprise a rather odd combination side by side. Old Testament King Josiah and New Testament King Herod. Josiah's story is found in 2 Kings 22-23. (And 2 Chronicles 34-35.) Throughout the 300 plus year history of kings in the Old Testament, there is a common refrain regarding most kings: "They did evil in the sight of the Lord."

Enter King Josiah, over 300 years after King David's time. And nearly a hundred years after the Northern Kingdom of Israel was obliterated by Assyria in a three-year war (2 Kings 17:5). Only Judah, the southern kingdom remains, and so does the temple in Jerusalem—at least for a little while. King Josiah, the boy king, begins his reign as an 8 year old. The potential possibilities for puppet politics! Ah, but Josiah has integrity and the parallel story in 2 Chronicles tells us (34:3) at age sixteen "he began to seek the God of his father David" and at twenty he started to purge the land of Asherah poles.

Asherah poles? Usually a wood pole with some semblance of this pagan goddess. It's what the people evidently clung to as their tangible god. What would be our Asherah poles today? Our houses? Success? Power? In other words it's a false god.

2 Kings 22:2 tells us something contrary to most kings in the Bible: "Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." At twenty-four, Josiah begins an extreme makeover of the temple. Ty Pennington isn't around so he calls on Hilkiah the high priest to take the lead. And in the process, The Book of the Law was found. That would have been the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Had no one read from it? For how long had this foundational document of the Jewish community been forgotten?

Hilkiah the high priest gave the book to Shaphan the secretary. Shaphan the secretary took the book to the king. Shaphan reported to the king how well the makeover was going and adds, "By the way, we found this book, let me read it to you." When Josiah heard the word of the Lord in the Torah, he tore his robe! An act of contrition, humiliation and repentance. "What have we done! We're not clinging to God, we're clinging to Asherah poles!"

Unfortunately the dye is set for Judah's future. Josiah's reform is only a shooting star in a dark night. Regardless, Josiah still has to look at himself in the mirror each night—and so do we. These are the king's orders: (verses 23:4ff): "remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah [v. 4] . . . do away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah [v. 5] . . . remove the Asherah pole from the

temple of the Lord [where!] . . . and burn it [v. 6] Tear down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes [what!], which were in the temple of the Lord [v. 7].” You don’t say!

And how long has this been going on! Well, Some of the things dated back to King Solomon’s time, and even before that to the time of Samuel. So let me get this straight. For over 300 years, for longer than the United States has been a country, the kingdom of Judah was worshipping this way?

Josiah instructs everyone to ready themselves for the Passover feast. And then this astounding statement in 23:22: “Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the Kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed.” Excuse me! Are we saying the foundational, community forming event has also been defiled? “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the laws of Moses.” (23:25)

I wonder what Art would have thought of all of this? Would he have walked up to Hilkiah the High Priest and say, “Don’t like it one bit, what’s going on around here! That Asherah pole has been there in the temple since my great grandfather came to this temple.”

What do we cling to? An old farmer friend from years ago said to me once, “Pastor, it seems that a lot of churches are more interested in form than they are in substance.” What do we cling to? Sometimes we cling to things because we are insecure—like our second king.

The second story is much more familiar to us. Magi follow a star and inquire of King Herod in Jerusalem as to the whereabouts of the Jewish newborn king (Matthew 2).

It stands to reason that the Magi should inquire of Herod. He would be an informed person and should know whether or not a newborn king of the Jews has made an appearance in his realm. But the news upsets him greatly. Not only was Herod upset, but “all Jerusalem with him”

Herod calls the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law and inquires of them where such a newborn king is to be born. He discovers that the birth is to take place just over the hill, a little out-of-the-way place called Bethlehem. “Make careful search for the child and report back to me so that I, too, may worship him!” (Matthew 2:8) Sly fox.

Two kings. Two very different responses to God. Josiah hears God’s Word and in humility, obedience, and honesty changes his ways and that of his country. The Asherah poles—ashes, ashes, they all fall down! I suppose Josiah could have stood in company with a long line of kings clinging to their Asherah poles “who did evil in the sight of the Lord”—who perpetuated tradition—who didn’t rock the boat. Josiah listens to God and obeys.

Herod hears the account of the Magi and also the words of the Old Testament prophet (Micah 5:2) about the birth of the Christ, the Messiah. But unlike Josiah, Herod is suspicious, threatened, and jealous. He clings to his “Asherah poles”—his gods, his power, his control, his influence. Behind the bravado is lack of confidence and uncertainty, a constant look over his shoulder at Rome. I suppose he could have stood in the short line of kings, willing to give up everything, to gain more than could possibly be comprehended. But he doesn’t.

It is a tale of two kings that is repeated throughout history; and our lives; and the church. If truth be known, we are all probably a mix of Josiah and Herod. We are all

equal opportunity hearers of God's Word. But how we respond—that's all about what we value.

I would offer one bit of advice: I wouldn't cling too tightly to Asherah poles if I were you. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:24ff: "Everyone who *hears* these words of mine *and* puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his home upon a rock."

"House Rule—God Rules"
Joshua 24:14-18, Joshua 24
Preached on January 15, 2006

Last week we encountered two kings: Josiah and Herod. Very different from each other, Josiah, open and yielded to God, valued his relationship with God. Herod on the other hand, suspicious and fearful, valued his own power rather than expose himself to the power of God. We introduced the concept of values through our two kings, and that some of the things we value are not necessarily good things. Remember Art, angry about his parking spot under the tree and his "reserved" pew. The underlying question: "Are we so locked into our own agenda as an individual or church, that change is impossible for us? Is it possible our agenda runs contrary to Christ-like living? In some ways we may be Herod's rather than Josiah's.

Along with change comes choice. The freedom to choose lies at the heart of what we value. Pastor Robert H. Schuller has said, "Never surrender to the menu."⁴ Walk into any restaurant in town and be overwhelmed by a menu. Look at the dessert stand positioned carefully at the entrance; that banana cream pie; that triple decadent chocolate

⁴ Robert H. Schuller, "Forgiving is Living," (sermon preached Garden Grove Community Church, Garden Grove, CA, 1979).

cake; hear and smell the sizzling steak as it comes to the table; look at that mountain of fries; that onion blossom. Better stop, we're getting hungry.

We can be overwhelmed by the choices on the menu life offers. Powerful forces influence our choices. And advertisers ruthlessly use these forces to influence our decisions.

Availability is one of these forces.

- Computers,
- Internet
- World wide web
- McDonalds
- Starbucks

Accessibility is the second force:

- More resources
- Money
- Credit
- Ability to move about
- Mobility

Acceptability is yet another force:

- Everyone's doing it, why not me
- "Com'on, don't be a party pooper."
- "No one is looking."
- "Join the band wagon."

Notice how we use the phrase, "It has *become* acceptable" which means that at one time it was not acceptable.

Anonymity is the fourth force:

- We're on the run more and frankly less observant
- Frequent moves
- "What happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas"
- We don't know our neighbors

As a child growing up in small Midwest town I knew most of the families. Whether through school, church, most people were socially connected. I'm not advocating a snooping, prying lifestyle, but there was genuine concern for each other.

Like firewalls on a computer protecting our information, or more importantly, our children, we can choose to apply healthy, life giving boundaries on our lives. Paul said, "Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything." (I Corinthians 6:13) And there are some in this very sanctuary who no doubt will be able to testify to the cruelty of certain task masters like addictions; or being mastered by a poor self image; or being mastered by an attitude of an unforgiving or vengeful spirit. Joshua reminds us of the most important choice we can make in our life: who or what is ultimate for us. Who rules? Who or what will we freely choose to serve?

Joshua's world had the same powers of availability, accessibility, and acceptability. (Maybe not anonymity to the same degree as we have today). For these things relate to human nature. This fledgling faith community was still trying to get a handle on what it meant to have a relationship with God. We are only a couple generations removed from the Exodus and ten commandment formative events.

We have arrived in the Promised Land! This Joshua is the same Joshua who "fit the battle at Jericho." In this strange, new Promised Land there were cities and nations with their gods galore. And the proclivity of the people to chase after foreign gods, already well attested too, was accentuated. They didn't have to create a molten calf. Remember Exodus 32:22-24? "Moses, we didn't know what happened to you, so we threw our gold into the fire and *out popped this calf!*" (*Yeah, sure!*) Now the Hebrew

people had *accessible* the gods of many nations in addition to the ancient gods of their forefathers that had grown *acceptable*.

Now at the end of his life, Joshua, just like Moses, gathers the Hebrew leaders together for a renewal of the promises made between God and his people. Joshua replays God's activity in the hearing of the people. No less than 18 times the personal pronoun "I" is used to describe God's activity.

- I chose your father Abraham (24:3)
- I gave him Isaac (24:3)
- I sent Moses and Aaron (24:5)
- I brought your fathers out of Egypt (24:5)
- I brought you to the land of Amorites (24:8)
- I delivered you out of the hand of Balak king of Moab, (24:9)
- The Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites. I gave you (24:11)
- I have given you this land on which you are now standing. (24:13)
- I have given you cities you have not built (24:13)
- I have given you vineyards and olive groves you did not plant. (24:13)

Therefore:

- Fear the Lord and serve Him (24:14-15)
- Reject the gods of your forefathers.
- Reject the gods in whose land we now reside.

The covenant with God meant all foreign alliances were to be cast off as well as any alliance with any other god was to be rejected. Gone are the days of "When in Rome, do as the Romans." Or as the case may be "When in Jericho"

How would we relate this to our lives today? First, do away with the gods of your forefathers. What about that baggage we carry with us throughout our lives? Do we carry with us the gods of prejudice, of fear, or preconceived notions? Do we perpetuate forms of bondage, of abuse or addiction that have held our families bondage for generations? We have a choice. We do not have to claim the same things as our forefathers, even our

parents, especially those things that have entrapped us—the bondage to the god of alcohol, of growing up in an alcoholic family, and the shadow that casts to the second and third generation; the cycle of poverty or abuse; the cycle of attitudes and activity that have been deemed acceptable because “everyone is doing it.” Do away with the gods of your forefathers. With God this is possible.

Secondly, do away with the gods you are entertaining now. The ones that by free choice you have allowed into your house, heart, and head. Do not look down upon the Israelites of Joshua’s day. They are no different from us today! And so Joshua calls to the people to declare their allegiance, much like what we did in Wesley’s Covenant Service on New Year’s Day. Joshua, the leader of the Hebrew people, perhaps like any pastor calls out, choose between the gods beyond the river or Yahweh.

And the climax arrives: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!” And the crowd went wild! The people responded enthusiastically. It was a holy moment as the Hebrew leaders got caught up in the drama and shouted: “So will we!” But Joshua asked a second time (24:19-21)

- Was he not satisfied with the response?
- Were some people holding out?
- Did he know human nature?
- Had it become a moment to simply go along with the crowd?
- How could Joshua be sure the people were sincere?

Religious experience can be faked writes Luke Timothy Johnson. People get caught up in a crowd and want to please and be accepted. Most people don’t want to be the odd person out. “Religious experience is a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action.”⁵

⁵ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 60.

Issuing in action! Johnson writes: “An experience of beauty [such as a concert] can possess [certain] components of [a religious experience]: the music can be given a certain ultimacy and intensity and can . . . engage every aspect of the person. An aesthetic experience, however, is sufficient unto itself. The experience of beauty is enough. I leave the concert profoundly moved and perhaps even shaken, and I can’t stop [humming a tune], *but I return the next day to my ordinary life.*”⁶ I have not organized my existence around my experience of the ultimate. It is simply a high, dramatic moment. But Joshua is calling for a true religious re-alignment issuing in action.

And so Joshua calls out repeatedly to the people: who do you choose to serve? Am I willingly, freely choosing to have my life pulled apart and reorganized by my creator? I guess something like defragmenting a computer. We call it being “born again.” “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.” (24:19) Joshua was not suggesting God’s incapability or even lack of interest in forgiving sins. Joshua was testing the people. Was he saying, “I’ve known you too long”?

Again the people respond, vehemently proclaiming their faithfulness. A third time (24:22-24) Joshua calls to the people asking them to be witnesses against themselves if they did not turn from their idol worship. And yet a fourth time, this time specifically calling on the people to throw away the foreign gods that were among them. Okay people, three times you have responded with your lips. Now, walk the walk. And as if in response to every “I” action of God, the word “serve” is used by either Joshua or the people in their desire to relate to God.

⁶ Ibid.

Much like Jesus challenges Peter, “Feed my sheep” in response to every time Peter denied knowing Jesus prior to his crucifixion. There is One who remains constant throughout all history; always available and always accessible: Our God. There will always be, as there has always been, competition luring us away from God, distracting us from our mission and goal in life. And sometimes those pressures are not only internally tempting they can be powerfully imposed.

Perhaps a little known piece of history in the Christian Church is The Barmen Confession, born out of the experiences of Nazi Germany. The Churches had come under extraordinary pressure to comply with the Third Reich. A foreign value structure was being forcibly imposed upon the church and many people were caving in. But a small group of 139 people met in 1934 to write out their stand against Nazi Germany and the so called German Christian movement who supported Hitler. Karl Barth, one of the great theologians of the past century, was the primary writer of the Barmen Confession. One line of the confession states boldly, “Try the spirits whether they are of God!”⁷ This lengthy confession is really a core value statement rejecting false doctrine. Some say the statement did not go nearly far enough, but it was an effort in the face of rising, intense, evil power.

Viktor E. Frankl likewise had first hand experiences of the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps made these poignant observations:

Let me recall that which was perhaps the deepest experience I had in the concentration camp. The odds of surviving the camp were no more than one to twenty . . . it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me. I found myself confronted with the question of whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning.

⁷ *Book of Confessions*, 309.

I did not notice that an answer to this question was already in store for me. This was the case when I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn out rags of an inmate who died shortly before my arrival. I found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat a single page torn out of a prayer book which contained the prayer: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:4)

[He would later conclude,] You can take away my wife, you can take away my children, you can strip me of my clothes and my freedom, but there is one thing no person can ever take away from me, and that is my freedom to choose how I will react to what happens to me.⁸

- Joshua: Choose you this day whom you will serve.
- Jesus says: No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24)
- Paul says: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. If we recognize that, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching. (Eph 4:5, 14)

What if we were to replay our individual history? What if we were to have a

Joshua 24 recounting of our life history reminding us of how God has worked in our life?

What if we were to have a Joshua 24 replay of Evangel Height's history: reminding us of

how God has worked in our church's life? When we come honestly face to face with

God, we begin to see the distractions for what they are, false gods, dead ends. How we

confess that we have spun our wheels about so many things, expended so much energy on

things that quite frankly have little to do with the kingdom of God.

Who is our God? "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

"What's In the Store"

Isaiah 58:1-10

Preached on January 22, 2006

In a great "urban legend" two prowlers broke into a department store. They took nothing, absolutely nothing, but they did a most ridiculous thing. Instead of stealing

⁸ Robert H. Schuller, *The Be Happy Attitudes: Eight Positive Attitudes That Can Transform Your Life* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 199-200.

anything, they changed the price tags of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. The price tag on a \$395 camera was exchanged for the price tag of a \$5 box of stationery. The sticker of a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. The next morning the store opened at usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours before anyone noticed what had happened. For four hours! Some people got some great bargains! For four hours no one noticed that all the values had been swapped.⁹

But it's not that hard to believe when we have seen a lifetime, not just four hours, of values run amuck. Our expectations and value systems are out of synch.

- We elevate the body and degrade the soul
- We promote success and suspect humility
- We defend our rights without regard for justice
- What's in it for me comes before any regard for the needs of others.

In retail business, every Wal-Mart and family owned business knows one vital thing: If what's on the outside does not match what's on the inside, you're not going to be in business very long. Worse yet, if what's inside contradicts what is shown on the outside, you don't have a chance!

There was a man in one of my earlier churches who was in charge of the window displays for a department store. When we heard about his experience, we immediately put him in charge of some of our decorating for Christmas. Wow! When he lit a Christmas tree, you had to put sunglasses on. I think he managed to fit over 4,000 lights on one tree. He knew how to put on a show. But he also knew that what was on the inside was just as critical, if not more so. Thing is, this is not just a vital business principle, this is a godly principle for living our lives and the conduct of church.

⁹ Story adapted from Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 31-32,

Over the years I have encountered a shocking number of people who have frankly told me that they find more concern in a bar than in a church—closer to God in a garden than in an experience with Christians. There’s something wrong here! For more people in this world than you realize, including some church people, there is a mismatch between God and his church. And last I checked, God hasn’t moved! When I think of God, I think of love, compassion, justice, truth, possibility, potential, life, hope. What would you add?

You can say all this in another name: Jesus. Think of a few Jesus encounters. In Max Lucado style:

- The desperate woman with the flow of blood, Jesus healed and encouraged her faith
- The woman caught in adultery—he forgave her
- The untouchable leper who asked for cleansing—he touched him
- The blind welfare case that cluttered the roadside—he honored him
- The worn-out old windbag addicted to self-pity near the pool of Siloam—he healed him.
- The children of the area—he welcomed them.
- Are you getting the concept?
- The Samaritan woman who came to the well alone, hurt and distrusting of everyone—he talked to her.
- Zacchaeus the tax collector, greedy and power hungry—he ate with him.
- The Canaanite woman willing to eat the crumbs of bread left to dogs—he marveled at her faith and welcomed her
- The penitent thief about to die beside Jesus on the cross—if anyone was ever worthless, this one was; if any fellow was ever a lose, this fellow was at the top of the list.
- Perhaps that is why Jesus chose him as a parting shot to show history what God think is truly important.
- “Hey buddy, any chance you could put in a good word for me?” “Consider it done!”¹⁰

And what does Jesus say to any of us? Get lost? Hardly. It’s because of what Jesus has “in the store.” In His heart. And so why is it when many people think of God’s people or God’s church, they do not think of the same things? And that’s why many churches

¹⁰ Adapted from Max Lucado, *Ibid*, 35-36.

across our world are falling into irrelevancy. That's why the church is being ignored in many circles of society. That's why church simply is not a priority. I want to be a part of a relevant church! I want to be a part of a church willing to get a little messy. It's not just about appearances, but what's in the store.

Isaiah 58 helps us understand with what God wants to stock the shelves. Isaiah 58 starts by making a startling observation: Believers often get the window dressing, the form, the show mixed up with the substance. If outside appearances consume our energies, then we are, as Jesus said to the Pharisees, merely "whitewashed tombs."

The passage from Isaiah 58 is particularly cutting. Imagine if we were to pull the window dressing stunt with God. Isaiah 58 basically says, we have, and God isn't giving any Golden Globe Awards. My own version of the opening lines of Isaiah 58, God is speaking:

They *seem* eager to know my ways.
 They ask me for right judgments,
 and *seem* eager for me to come near them.
 They say to me, "We have fasted! *and you have not seen it?*"
 We have humbled ourselves! *and you haven't noticed?*"
 How can I notice, when all your actions are like window dressing.
 Fasting you say!? Every time you do it you start to grumble
 and end up quarrelling and fighting amongst yourselves.
 You expect me to hear you when you carry on the way you do.
 Or how about when you think that one day—*one day*—even one hour
 of 'show time' will avert my eye from the rest of the week.
 You bow your head and say you're sorry, and then return to your old ways
 as if nothing has changed.
 Listen to me now, and I will show you a better way
 and it will lead to an abundant, rich, purposeful life.
 Do what I would do. When you hear someone crying, listen to them
 and comfort them.
 When you see someone in the prison of sin, loosen their bonds.
 When you see someone ensnared with troubled, set them free.
 When you see someone shivering in the cold, cover them.

Fasting, in and of it self is not sufficient to cause God to turn to His people. “A true fast had to indicate that the people were intent on seeking justice and righteousness, which included taking care of the poor and needy.”¹¹ Jesus had much to say about “the show” of religious life when he spoke in the Sermon on the Mount about making sure that if one gave, do not let the right hand know what the left hand was doing. Or if you prayed, do so in secret. Or if fasting, do not heap ashes upon your head simply to make yourself look miserable and dejected. God knows the inner substance. What’s the show all about?

Okay, let’s get real practical. You think your show will let people who do not know God, people who are hurting, think that God is going to care for them, or you for that matter? This is all about righteous living. Living in right relationship with God and your fellow human being—being a servant. The righteous person is actually a person who has been set free by God to do righteous things. The righteous person is one who serves God and others in conformity to His nature.¹²

The nature of righteous service is justice driven. Remember when you were a child, when it seems the issues of life were more clear, crying out “That’s not fair. That’s not right.” Jesus demonstrates for us simple, clear, penetrating justice: care for the poor, the forgotten, the outcast, the hurting. Isaiah 58 tells us, this is not only Jesus’ work, but ours as well.

The nature of righteous service is justice driven and compassion conditioned.

Back in Isaiah 42:2-3, the prophet speaks about the future Messiah,

- He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets
- A bruised reed he will not break; a smoldering wick he will not snuff out

¹¹ Harris, R.L., Archer, G.L. and Walktke, B.K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* elec. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999, c1980) 758.

¹² Ibid, 752.

The pattern for righteous living established by Jesus is a servanthood that will not neglect responsibility or consequence. It is not enabling. Righteous living *sets people free!*

- Loosen the chains
- Untie the cords
- Set the oppressed free
- Break every yoke

Righteous service is justice driven, compassion conditioned and Spirit inspired. Jesus will say it this way in Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19/Isaiah 61:1-2) The great heritage of the Methodist Church begins with John Wesley one of the great reformers of the church, who took the gospel to the streets to meet the needs of the people. His was a relevant, needs meeting ministry of his day that the established church of England, frankly could not tolerate.

Righteous servanthood is the tireless demonstration of God’s justice wrapped in compassion. Who are the least, the last and the lost of our day? Jesus basically said, “You get in touch with them, you get in touch with me.” Matthew 25:35ff says “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in”

Now I believe that each person and each church does this according to the ways God calls them. In one of the churches I served, there was a monthly chapel service the church held at the local rescue mission. For more than thirty years, a team of people arrived at the mission with a truck full of cookies and a genuine desire to touch the lives of forty or so men who were having a tough time. It wasn’t a hit and run type of ministry they were in it for the long haul and year around. The leadership team asked me to preach a few

times. At first I fretted. What on earth could I say? I couldn't relate to the experiences of the homeless. I had never been involved with a church that had such constant and direct relationship with a rescue mission until that time.

The first time I preached, I remember arriving early, anxious and nervous. And I saw love and acceptance, even for me. And I saw hurt and heartache. I heard hopes and dreams. And what a hungering for God's word did I experience there. I asked our church members, "When can I preach there again?" And they said, "Well, there's Elmer, and Tom, and Phil, Linda (all lay people). Pastor, you're just going to have to stand in line!"

How is God calling Evangel Heights to righteous servanthood within our community? This is how one church in the Chicago area, did it. You might not agree with all of their views, I didn't. But the Body of Christ is a diverse one. This church was known for its cutting edge ministry, I'm not talking about worship styles. They passionately held their core values based on their understanding of the prophetic messages. On the front lawn of the church was a large sign that read, "Nuclear Free Zone." At about the time I was in seminary they established their property as a "sanctuary" for those seeking asylum from dictators in Central America. The church actually housed aliens at great risk. The church intentionally sought to define whom the least the last and the lost were in their ministry context. They were socially aware in a very sophisticated way. In the center of the sanctuary hung a plumb line suggestive of Isaiah 28:17, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line."

This may or may not be Evangel Heights, but it suggest that as a church we intentionally encounter and reflect on God's Word, as we are doing, to identify our call, our value structure, in order to honor God. It is clearly not window dressing. It's all

about “What’s in the Store!” In fact, you don’t even have to worry about window dressing, because if you tend to the contents of the store, listen to what Isaiah says will happen: “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will call, and he will say: ‘Here am I.’”

“Giving Away the Store”
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Preached on January 29, 2006

Last week we spoke of what was in the store. What is inside of us that can be shared with those around us. From the perspective of Isaiah 58, Luke 4 and Matthew 25, the store needed to have an ample supply of justice for those who were wronged, provisions for compassion for those who were hurting and in need, and a super abundance of the Holy Spirit giving strength and wisdom in how to use the contents of our store.

We called it righteous living:

- Justice driven
- Compassion controlled
- Spirit led.

The origin of the contents in our store are not the results of a shopping spree on QVC; we didn’t go online with Land’s End; we didn’t go over the University Park Mall to shop the close out sale at Marshall Fields. What’s inside our store originated at the cross. What is

inside our heart, our soul, our mind, is the eternal, super abundant overflow of God's love from the cross of Jesus.

But we talked last week that many hurting people in this world would rather go anywhere but to a church, anywhere but to a Christian for help. They don't find God's love, but our judgment. They don't find God's compassion, but our condemnation. They don't find God's abundance, but our reservation. All we do sometimes is window shop and take care of appearances; do a little show for God, but there is really little in the store. It seems some Christians need to stay a little longer under the shadow of the cross. Jesus even said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised" (Acts 1:4) The gift of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, some Christians, just like to be mall rats—just hanging out at God's super mall, taking it all in, just wanting to be blessed, but not wanting to be a blessing. They haven't left Jerusalem, even though their arms are full, the shopping cart is full and the back of their van is full, they still want more.

This is a little bit of what is going on in Corinth. You really need to go back to Chapter 8 in 2 Corinthians to see the whole picture. There was a need to give aid to the Jerusalem Church. Paul had been going around asking support for Jerusalem Christians and found a very poor church in Macedonia excited about the possibility of helping, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints." (2 Cor. 8:2-3) Wow! There may not have been a lot of money,

but there sure was a lot in the store, and they were willing to give away the store in joy.

This is what they valued!

Corinth, however, with a huge capacity for giving by comparison, seemed to be eager, but needed some coaxing to “complete this act of grace” (2 Cor. 8:6). Amazingly we discover “Last year” the Corinthians “were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it” (2 Cor. 8:10-11) I argue that if you have to coax, any gift ceases to be grounded in grace, but is given grudgingly and under compulsion. Paul knows this. And attempts to teach the Corinthian church a core value laden lesson concerning the Christian faith:

Paul starts in 8:9 reminding us of this core fact: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” God gave away the store. Through Jesus, God has thrown open the doors of his riches and makes them available to us. When you come right down to it, giving is at the very core of life. Without giving, life would not exist.

- God gives out of His abundance, Creation.
- God gives us the record of his interaction with His creation, the Bible.
- God gave us his Son Jesus.
- God gives us His Spirit.
- Through the Spirit, God gives us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control, forgiveness.

God never ceases giving to perpetuate life—he gives life eternal.

Paul makes the further point that is vital, in 8:13-14, “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.” Get this, they didn’t need money, they had plenty of it. They

needed something more substantial—a deeper understanding of the importance of right relationship with God and others. This is what Paul’s whole letter to the Corinthians was all about. Paul will later say, “don’t let my boasting in you be hollow.” (9:3) In other words, if you talk the talk, walk the walk. If I were to bring someone from Macedonia along with me, they’ll turn to me and say, “What gives with these Corinthians!?”

The verses we read today comprise a Godly Economics 101 class. This is the basic, foundational core of the economics of Christianity. First, give sincerely, spontaneously and with joyful willingness. This is the way God gives. Have we ever given something only to be disappointed later? I recall a time when another pastor and I gave money to a person who seemed to be desperately in need. She had given us the address of where she and her family lived. After giving her some money, the other pastor said to me, “C’mon, jump in the car.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“We’re going to check out that address!” Something had sounded fishy to the other pastor and we searched for the address, an empty lot between two businesses. The only comfort we settled upon was this: desperate times for some people cause them to do desperate things. I think about all of the times I have given to those in need over the years. I hope and pray that all is well for each of them.

As for me, we recall the words, “a fool and his money are soon parted.” I would counter, “Lord, continue to give me the capacity to give, and give your Holy Spirit’s power of discernment and wisdom.” But I implore you, *do not let the world rip from our hearts, the basic economic principle of God’s kingdom: sincere, spontaneous, joyful willingness to give as God has given.* Do not let the world’s sin, diminish the Christian’s

joyful generosity. I have to admit that it has left me sometimes, but I must constantly remember that God's economy is different from the world's economy.

Second, you can only give what you have received, whether material or spiritual. Peter illustrates this point when he said to a crippled man begging beside the road, "silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Acts 3:6) The fact remains, we have been given more than we can possibly imagine. God has poured into our lives resources, abilities, gifts beyond our imagining. And if we do not realize that, then we need to spend more time in Jerusalem at the cross.

Third, verse 8 is key: "All grace . . . in all things at all time, having all that you need . . . in every good work. God's every grace abounds so that we can abound in every good work. It's not about us. This is not a verse that tells us that we will all become Donald Trumps. It is, as we said last week, about righteous living . . . a right relationship with God and with others. God will provide all that is needful in every good work, and this grace will result in thanksgiving. This is generosity that creates a relationship, not a contractual relationship of lender and debtor, but community. This is a gracious community built on blessing that binds us together. We are righteous planters, then, proving that God will continue to supply us so that we can keep on giving.

It's the sowing and reaping cycle Paul speaks of. Sow seeds, reap the harvest, but in the harvest are contained the seeds for the next year's sowing. God is always about giving forward. In the thanksgiving of the Jerusalem people can be found the seeds for next year's harvest. Part of our problem is that in our economy we are short sighted in our thinking, we think immediate gratification. God is thinking eternal salvation.

Think of it this way. Once there was a man lost in the desert, near death from thirst. He wandered aimlessly through the burning sand for many days growing weaker by the moment. At long last he saw an oasis far in the distance. Palm trees indicated a source of water! He stumbled forward and finally fell beneath the shade of a palm tree. Finally he would quench his tortured thirst. But then he noticed something strange about this particular oasis. Instead of a pool of water or a spring bubbling up from the ground, the man found a pump. And beside the pump were two objects, a small jar of water, and a note on parchment paper. The note explained that a leather gasket within the pump must be saturated with water for the pump to work. Within the jar was just enough water for this purpose. The note also warned the reader not to drink from the jar. Every drop must be poured into an opening at the base of the pump to soak the heat-dried gasket. Then, as the leather softened and expanded, an unlimited supply of sweet water would be available. The parchment's final instructions were to refill the container for the next traveler's use.

The man faced a dilemma. He was dying of thirst, and he had found water. Not much, not even enough to save his life. But it seemed the height of folly to pour it away down the base of the pump. On the other hand, if the note was accurate, by pouring out the small quantity of water, he would then have all he wanted. What should he do?

What would you do? We think immediate gratification. In God's economy, there is provision for eternal salvation. God has given us the parchment paper instructions for our living, and a significant part of the instructions have to do with justice and compassion for the hurting and lost.

We need to learn how to release, how to let go, and give away the store. Gifted preacher Dr. Steve Bland spoke last week at United Seminary.¹³ He recalled a time for us:

Sidney Australia, during the 2000 Summer Olympics. The event is the 400 women's relay race. This was going to be the race America would dominate! Four of the best runners ever assembled: leg one is Christy Gaines, leg two Gail Devers, leg three, Inge Miller, and finally, leg four, the infamous Marion Jones.

Process of a relay race, each person runs 100 meters of the race and then release a baton into the hands of the next runner. There's a special science to this. You can't just pass the baton when you feel like it, you can't pass it when you get ready, you can't pass it however you want... there is a certain place called the exchange zone. It's not so much about the speed of the runner, but the effectiveness of the exchange. In other words, it's not so much about how much one has, but the effectiveness of what you do with it.

But disappointment prevailed. Two star runners were injured. Torre Williams replaced Gail Devers. Nobody heard of her. Nancine Perry replaced Inge Miller. The truth is that had been on the team and with the team, but because of the running skills of the four all star women who ran, they never anticipated they would ever get a chance. They rode with the team, they had the uniform of the team, they walked around with the team, they entered the stadium with the team, waved to the fans

Then all of a sudden the coach called them in and said, "You must run." They looked like they were ready to run, talking like they were great runners, but when the time came to run, panic began to set in. They were not mentally prepared for this event. Inserted in the second and third leg were two new runners who did not come to the early practice. They were laughing and talking in the bleachers giving commentary to each other, "Now look at that, if I were running this race, this is what I would do. I would run better than that!" They were giving all this commentary on what they WOULD do, but the moment to run has now come!

Because of two bad hand-offs. The race wasn't lost because these two couldn't run, because you have to be a GREAT runner to even be on the team. The race was lost because they did not practice the hand off. They couldn't transition. They could not release. They couldn't give.

Problem 1: What happens when there are great needs and hurts in this world, which there are, and we are wrapped up in our own little private race...just you and me God. And we never hand off; we never give forward. Jesus said it this way once, "Which

¹³ Dr. Steve Bland, (untitled sermon delivered at United Theological Seminary Doctoral Studies Intensive, 25 January 2006), Dayton, OH.

of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” (Mat 7:9-10)

Problem 2: So often we get caught up in the “would-a, should-a, could-a” game. I would give if only I should give, but I could give, however We romance about helping . . .

- “If I had a million dollars, I would”
- “If only I had the time, I would”
- “Look at that problem over there, if only”

But the other thing about a relay race is that you have to stay in your lane, or else you are disqualified. Stop romancing about what you could or might do.

Those who are faithful in a little will be given more. Righteous living, giving away the store is about being faithful. But you have to stay in your lane. Give gladly, sincerely, willingly, joyfully from what God has given you, then God’s economy will begin to kick in. I’m not talking about becoming fabulously wealthy. I’m talking about faithfully running the race that is set before you. You never know when God is going to call you for an opportunity; and if you have faithfully learned the lesson of giving away the store, opportunities will come. And if you have been faithful in giving away the store, you won’t drop the baton—you will know exactly what to do.

In 1991 Hanfield UMC had gone to two services:

By 1992 we had out-grown our facility again. We had classes meeting in every room, closet, and boiler room—we even had a class meeting on the landing of the basement steps. Our Building Study Committee had taken several field trips, planning on a building expansion project for our current site. However we were land locked and our neighbors would not sell us land. In addition, our community was located literally in a cornfield, miles from any population center.

It was in this period of time,” writes the pastor, “when [a missionary] spoke at a men’s prayer breakfast. He shared with us his vision for building a conference center in central Africa. It would be a place for youth camps, training seminars, agricultural and medical workshops, and pastors’ training school. It

would be an entire campus, patterned after Epworth Forest, located near the village of Nyembo. After the breakfast, the missionary privately mentioned to me the possibility of Hanfield UMC raising the funds for the Nyembo Chapel. The cost of the chapel would be \$12,000. I thought to myself, 'We need someone to give *us* \$12,000. We don't need to be giving other people money right now.'"

While at Senior High Bible Conference in August of '02, I was praying during one of the evening services. I sensed the Holy Spirit say: 'Before you build the church at Hanfield, build the chapel at Nyembo.' I replied, 'No, that's not what we want to do.' After a prolonged argument with the Lord, I finally said, "Yes, Lord."

The Hanfield Building Study Committee was actually thrilled with this new vision. Along with the Missions Committee, we began to raise the funds for the Nyembo chapel. It took one and a half years. It took an additional one and a half years to raise funds to send a team of five to Congo (then Zaire) for the dedication of the chapel.

In these 3 years, the Lord opened the opportunity for us to buy ground on SR 13. We believe we have reaped this excellent location now, because we had sown in the African church earlier.¹⁴

There are opportunities and possibilities before us. You don't have to look far, they come right at us if we care to notice. God has handed off to us the riches of eternity to tackle every opportunity that comes our way. He has given away the store and filled our store. If you are concerned that your store is going to get depleted, then you don't know the same God I know. And if you think this church doesn't have an ability to make a difference, then this church doesn't know the same God I know. God has filled the store. God has set us in a race. God has placed us in a lane. Now he is just waiting for the hand off so that we can keep on running. God is just waiting for us to give away the store, so that he can fill it again.

And when we are handing off the baton, when we are giving away the store, we are handing off to none other than Jesus, who will run that last lap for us—the author and finisher of our faith.

¹⁴ Used by permission, Hanfield United Methodist Church, Hanfield, IN.

“The Resurrection Words of Jesus”
Matthew 28:16-20, (Mark 16:15-18), Luke 24:45-49,
John 20:21-23, John 21:15-19
Preached on February 5, 2006

I have thought for many years that whenever a conversation takes place the last words spoken in that conversation carried the most weight: whether the person talking was warming up throughout the conversation and saved the best or most important issue for last; or whether, simply, last things stay in our memory the best. It seems to me that last words have significance. What if we apply that concept to Jesus’ resurrection words? Can Jesus’ last words, spoken after his death, during his resurrection appearances be helpful to us in our uncovering core values for the church today?

Rick Warren has said, “Jesus founded the church, died for the church, sent his Spirit to the church, and will someday return for his church. As the owner of the church, he has already established the purposes, and they’re not negotiable.”¹⁵ Are some of those “purposes” as Rick Warren stated, or core values evident in Jesus’ resurrection words? Let’s see if there are some patterns that emerge as we take a quick look at the endings of each of the gospels.

Jesus said in Matthew 28, “[G]o and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (verse 19-20a) A simple word: “Go.” Not “Wait for people to come to you.”

One UMC had an opportunity to purchase a former church building and property. It had been the dream of the senior pastor to establish a second site to reach out and go to those in the inner city for they would not “come” to where they were. The church was purchased for \$1. Considerable amount of interior work was needed to bring the building up to standard. A team of craftsman from the church went to work on the sanctuary and some of the classrooms. The site

¹⁵ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 98.

opened the fall of 2001 as Open Arms and attracted a small multi ethnic group. The intent of the original dream was not so much to create another church, but rather to have one church meeting at two different locations. The main campus provided the bulk of the financial support (\$100,000 annually) and staffing for Open Arms.

Now into its fourth year, events converged that make Open Arms a truly vibrant multi-ethnic site. An Hispanic UMC ministry needing to find a new home was incorporated into the Open Arms family. Recently another struggling church outside of the UMC has just joined the fold of Open Arms Struggling at its beginning, this ministry has grown and now holds two services. With no attempt at dividing the two sites, staff and financial support are still shared.

In the midst of these years, the church has come to grips with a deeper understanding of what it means to attract people to Christ. It is not so much about “coming” as it is about “going” into the community. The church now has several significant new outreaches into the community. A local university recently became a residential campus and the church intentionally reaches out to students on campus through staff and ministries. Upward Basketball and Soccer have been added to the ministry offerings. Excitement builds for these new ministries as hundreds of new individuals and families are being touched with the Gospel message.¹⁶

Jesus says, “Go.” There is a lot of going, going on in most churches. Churches are for the most part busy places. But some of the going is “much ado about nothing.” Some of the things churches do have little to do with our “charter.” Jesus says, in his resurrection words, “Go, teach, and make disciples.”

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism over two hundred years ago, when gathering his first conference of pastor was consumed by three basic questions: what to teach, how to teach and what to do. And in answering these questions Wesley said we need to be about spreading scriptural holiness and transforming people into disciples of Jesus.

So, what do we teach and how do we teach it? Last Sunday evening a great Hallmark movie aired about a teacher who was sent to teach black children on a remote Carolina island, Abacraw. The lead teacher on this island was known for her severe

¹⁶ Used by permission, The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Fort Wayne, IN.

treatment of the children and a pervasive attitude that these children really could not learn, so you had to literally beat it into them. What's wrong with this picture? The new teacher had an entirely different style that the children immediately took to.

Every teacher knows there is a relationship between what to teach and how to teach it. Jesus certainly knew this. It is said at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount that he did not teach the people like the teachers of the law of their day, but as one who had authority. (Matthew 7:28-29) An authority is like the author of the book. You have a problem? You go to the one who knows. The author. The author-ity. But beyond that it also has to do with relationship and trust. Jesus is the author of life; he is the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus is telling us to enter into life changing relationships for kingdom purposes.

Evidently Don Shula understood this, too. In an interview with Lyle Blackwood, who played on the Dolphins football team that went to Super Bowl 19, he was asked what stood out most for him when he thought of his coach Don Shula:

The thing that I admired most about Coach Shula was how much he loved the game and how focused he was when we were in the heat of battle. He was on the field with the players all of the time, in mind and spirit, always using every ounce of influence he had. To be a good coach you have to feel like that, to be one with the players and with what is going on in the game. You have to be so connected to the game that, even though you are on the sideline, your players are an extension of you and you play through them." The players are an extension of the coach.¹⁷

Hmm . . . "And surely I am with you always to the very end of the . . . [game]."

What to we teach? How do we teach? What do we do? Jesus tells us in broad brush strokes in his resurrection words: In Matthew 28 Jesus tells us to teach all that He has commanded us. We can look to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. We can

¹⁷ John Maxwell, *INJOY*, <http://www.injoystewardship.com/solutions/vol1/012005/influence.htm>. (accessed February 3, 2006).

recall Jesus' commandment that "love" sums up all the law and prophets. Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." What is the good news: we have said over the past couple of weeks that this good news has to do with "setting people free from captivity to sin—ministries of justice and compassion.

The resurrection words in Luke 24:47 gets more specific about how to proclaim this good news: "[R]epentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." John 20:22: "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

At the heart of the church is a ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation made available to us through Jesus. This is one of the core concepts expressed in the resurrection words of Jesus: Reconciliation and forgiveness. This is the gift of God to us as individuals and to a hurting world. And this is one of the most important tasks you and I have in this world: a ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation. To that end, there is something the church can offer this world that no other group can.

The resurrection words of Jesus in Matthew talks about baptism, but let me also add communion. God has given us tools to help demonstrate and show the power of His gracious good news. Through the centuries baptism and communion have been the outward demonstrations of God's grace showing the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

- It is why one church made available their phone lines to people during worship if they needed to initiate a process of forgiveness before they took communion.
- It is why historically churches have had the passing of the peace before communion – it was not merely an exchange of pleasantries, but a meaningful and powerful way for people to come to terms with their relationship with others.
- It is why the liturgy for communion has some form of confession.
- It is why some churches have a formal confessional.

At the heart and soul of the church is a ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation. This was one of the most significant ways of reaching the lost and searching souls of this world. This is what the church can offer the world—to both the sinner and sinned against.

There is hope. God's grace and forgiveness are real and powerful and can be demonstrated around this table set for us now. (*Consecrate elements—take communion*)

If a church begins to come to terms about their identity, their purpose, their core values, they must enter into a deeper understanding of the power of what we just experienced, the common meal...and the implications of this meal for our every day life. Do you realize that over the last few minutes we have come face to face with God's grace? We have come face to face with God's forgiveness. We have come face to face with heaven. For this is a rehearsal of what is to come in our heavenly home.

Jesus follows his own words as he reinstates Peter. Jesus himself utilizes the tools of forgiveness and reconciliation he spoke of earlier. He dramatically demonstrates the power of forgiveness with his own disciple, Peter. After a fish fry, Jesus turned to Peter, in John 21. How can you have a meal with the Lord, and walk away unchanged? If a church needs to come to terms with our identity, purpose and core values, each of us as individuals must also.

And so Jesus, in his resurrection words confronts Peter, the one who denied knowing him three times prior to his death:

- “Do you truly love me more than these fish?”
- “Oh yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”
- “Then feed my lambs.”

A second and third time Jesus asks of Peter, “Do you love me?” And each time Peter responds, “Of course I do,” with his hurt intensifying, Peter no doubt replayed each time

he had denied Jesus. And for each time Jesus replies, “Then feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep . . . feed my sheep.” And finally, “Follow me.” The breach has been overcome. Peter reinstated. You see, these are not mere words to Jesus. His Resurrection words give power to our lives and to His church. So what about us? Let’s go and teach and make disciples!

“Value Added Community”
Acts 2:42-47
Preached on February 12, 2006

Community. What are the first words you think of when I say the word community? (Ask congregation)

I grew up in a community: the little town of Roselle, about 35 miles west of Chicago. It was considered a farming community when I was a little child. Just beyond our back yard was a field where cows roamed. One cow got loose in our back yard when I was growing up, but I don’t remember it, I was too young. Beyond the pasture was a wheat field. When I was in Junior High, that wheat field sprouted my new Junior High School.

About that time Roselle ceased to be a farming community and became what was known as a bedroom community. People commuted by car or train to Chicago. Most people in Roselle didn’t work in Roselle. We had a train station. But there was little to do in town: no bowling alley, no movie theater, no swimming pool, no restaurants, unless you want to include the Pizza Cottage and Shirl’s Drive In. That made us a bedroom community.

There are communities of varying sizes and purposes. There are religious communities, business communities; there are professional communities. These are usually not governed by geography. Some communities define themselves more by alliance, association or profession.

The church is a community. It is a community “where the ‘I’ give[s] way to the ‘we’” commented Pastor Nancy Ortberg. “Community is where we can live together in the world and proclaim together we are the sons and daughters of God and that we accept each other and that we will bear with each other. Community is not easy. ‘Community is where the least likely person you want to live with always lives.’”¹⁸ Communities have distinguishable markings. Even churches. There are written and unwritten expectations of behavior. There are recognizable rituals. There may be patterns of dress. There is a language that marks the church community. (Words like transubstantiation and pre-tribulation millennialism and the like!) Communities usually like to confuse outsiders with alphabet soup like UMCOR. Many of attributes are held in common by the entire Christian movement. There are variations within the worldwide community that mark regional, cultural, or theological differences. We often call these differences denominations.

Sociologists call these boundary markers or frames. If I were to describe a group of people to you:

- Houses are white
- No electricity
- Preferred form of transportation: a buggy (Amish)

Or,

¹⁸ Nancy Ortberg, “Authentic Community—Transformation” (sermon delivered during the 2000 Willow Creek Small Group Conference, 15-17 May 2000), Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL.

- Wears certain colors
- Hands or body signals for identification
- Graffiti to mark my territory and turf (gang member)

Boundaries define who is “in” and who is “out” of our group. They define who is “us” and who is “them.” They can determine who is “friend” and who is “foe.” It can lead to profiling of people and labeling

And sometimes this is an essential thing. No doubt FBI agents are attempting to profile the arsonists in Mississippi—at recent count nine Baptist churches have burned. That should get us angry. There are nine congregations that do not have houses of worship today. A part of the Body of Christ is grieving today.

Isn't that interesting what I just said, nine Baptist churches. Why didn't I say nine churches? I hope it would not make any difference to us as to the label on the door, but sadly, I know in this world, it does make a difference.

I have walked into some Christian pastor's conferences being the only Methodist and have been shunned until someone is brave enough to grill me as to my theological perspective, and only then have I been offered the right hand of fellowship. Unfortunately, some boundaries become impenetrable walls. That's a problem, especially when we compare the church to Jesus' ministry. Jesus seemed to be able to penetrate the most difficult of cultural situations. He freely associated with the outcast and ate with known sinners in his day and yet remained pure to purpose. Similarly, in our passage in Acts today, the church “enjoyed the favor of all the people.” That, it seems to me, is a hard thing to do. It didn't mean they went around agreeing with everybody, but there was an attitude, a spirit of love, joy, praise that permeated the people, that was infectious, that was winsome, and that, my friends is how the early church multiplied.

Well, the passage in Acts 2 is the first of several statements in the Book of Acts that serve as ministry progress reports (Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31). This is our first glimpse at the earliest church. And we have recorded for us some of the “markers” that identified the early group of followers.

- They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and prayer
- They shared their resources so that there were no needs
- They gathered daily in the temple courts and praised God
- They broke bread together in homes

They devoted themselves, that is, they persisted obstinately, associated closely, and were faithful in serving personally. This is HOW the church worked.

They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching. What it must have been like to have first hand witnesses of our Lord Jesus teaching. Before these gospels came into print, you could hear an eye witness who touched Jesus’ hand, who walked the same dusty paths side by side with the Master. It would be like what I John 1:3 says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.”

They were devoted to fellowship. I’m not talking about coffee hour here! I’m not talking about gathering over at Barne’s and Noble’s café. I’m not talking about hanging out at Sufficient Grounds or Starbucks. Don’t confuse the form with the function. And please do not substitute the form FOR the function. Fellowship has to do with relationship and accountability: Koinonia. It is inquiring as to the condition of one’s soul and spirit. It is about encouraging one another. It is about enjoying the relationship with God. They gathered in the temple courts, yes the Jewish temple courts! There was no church building on the corner of Josephus Drive and Eusebius Street.

Fellowship is the celebration of the relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ and the relationship we have with others through Him. I recall a time early in my ministry coaching a youth softball team. A new team surprisingly joined our league. Frankly, I was shocked they joined the league. This was a church notorious for its independence and was one of the strictest denominations known.

Here was our rag-tag team, never won a game (that gives you a hint as to the effectiveness of the coach!), and there was the other team on the other side of the field. And, as I had done for several years with every other game I called the two teams together. I go through my little speech. Welcoming, good sportsmanship, Christian fellowship “And then before we play, let’s pray: “Dear God”

I’m interrupted. The other pastor of the other church says, “Sorry, Pastor, we don’t pray before sporting events. If you want to pray, go ahead, but not with us.” And the other team was pulled off the field. The youth on both sides of the field looked at each other in shock. I could tell my team was a little hot. I have to admit, I was deflated. That prayer for me set the tone for the evening. We would not be conditioned by competition, but be governed by Christian fellowship. This evening was not about bats and balls, this evening was not about who won or lost, it was simply a tool, a venue, an ice breaker that would hopefully allow us to go deeper – break down dividing walls and build up the Body of Christ. We finished our prayer.

We did go ahead a play the game. That experience left a lasting impression on me and the youth. Oddly, we beat their pants off! (Now that is really mature!) We talked about this a couple weeks ago. We tend to get all tied up in the form and forget what we’re all about. Window dressing, but nothing is in the store. We miss the spirit.

They devoted themselves to breaking bread. Did they care whether it was whole wheat or rye? Idealistically I would hope not, but human nature being the same from age to age, I'm sure there was someone in that Jerusalem crowd that went home talking to another, "Boy wasn't that bread dry today?" We miss the whole point, again.

Breaking bread in the middle eastern culture has to do with relationship. And the importance of meals has less to do with what is served, than the prolonged time of the meal during which meaningful conversation is taking place.

I recall sitting down at a traditional middle eastern meal once. The only way I could enter into the meal was to break bread and dip it into a common pot, A bit like fondue! There were no utensils. The bread was my utensil, my way of entering into the relationship around the table.

Luke Timothy Johnson says of this "Meals are Where the Magic Is."¹⁹ We are not talking about rushing through a drive up window, dad driving, mom with a cell phone, sis with an I-pod and little Johnny with a Game-boy while everyone is juggling burger and fries. They devoted themselves to breaking bread. The meal is not the end, it is a means to an end. When the meal becomes the end, we say things like this: "What are we going to have?" We have turned it all inside out. What we are going to have is fellowship. I remember one group in a church years ago destroying their fellowship because the meals had become fraught with competition. We loose track of the very purposes we gather—we are celebrating the love God has lavished upon us and to share our common love for God and for each other.

They devoted themselves to prayer. They steeped their decisions, their directions in life in prayer. We'll talk more about this one next week.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 137-179.

They devoted themselves to meeting the needs of the community. They shared as there was need. They held things in common. They sold their possessions to make ministry possible. I have told many people over the years that there is little reference to tithing in the New Testament, and what references there are, are mostly negative. The New Testament speaks of giving as there is need, giving sacrificially as Jesus gave himself up as a fragrant offering. This shocks some people. We get so defensive about giving. We get so legalistic about the tithe, before taxes, after taxes, gross or net, just to the church or does it include other charities? I refuse to get tangled in that discussion. From the New Testament perspective, the early church people shared with each other for the advancement of God's purposes. They found a need and filled it. They made things happen with both their people and material resources.

The community was the Body of Christ, not a human institution. And that's the key. This is not a community that just haphazardly got together and said, "let's start a club and these are the values we will agree to adhere to." This community started at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Acts Chapter two is the birthing of the church. This is a Holy Spirit breathed community that results in devotion to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer and giving. We are seeing the nature of God, of His Son Jesus, and presumably, the church.

That's why the title of today's message plays off our Value Added Meal concept at our church. The church is a Value Added Community. It is not simply a community assembled around a common creed, though we have creeds. We are a value added community, in other words, a Holy Spirit community. They recognized that the Holy

Spirit was real, powerful, and was truly the only glue that knit them together so as to become the Body of Christ. We are the Body of Christ!

I'm afraid the church sometimes moves through this world as a fearful reactionary human institution, instead of a life changing, world changing, awe inspiring community.

- Because of their spirit led devotion, miraculous and awesome things were happening in Jerusalem.
- Because of their spirit led devotion they joyfully met material needs, emotional needs, and spiritual needs.
- Because of their spirit led devotion, daily, those being saved were added to this community.

That sounds very ideal, and it is tempting to paint the early church as that perfect place.

I've even had people tell me, oh, if only we can go back to the original church. It was not perfect and the book of Acts is an honest depiction of the early church and how it functioned. Next week we will encounter one of the early value-related dilemmas.

What are our markers in this church? How are we known? And how do we relate to each other in the conduct of God's ministry in His creation? Are we a value added community? God honoring, Christ centered, And Spirit-formed community?

“Passing the Dish”
Acts 6:1-7
Preached on February 19, 2006

Many of the big meals on special occasions in our family are served “family style” I remember it that way from when I was a child. The table is set. The hot pads are placed at strategic places around the table. On one hot pad will be the bowl of mashed potatoes. On another will be the green beans. Another might be ham already sliced. In addition there is the basket of rolls, dish of olives and pickles, the butter and so on. The

goal is to get all of these dishes passed around in such a way that everyone has had an opportunity to take what they want. Invariably there is something that intrudes on the idyllic scene. One dish is too hot to pass, and so all the plates are passed to the person nearest that dish while others try to figure out who has received what and missed what. Somewhere in the midst of all this someone will shout out, “Did everyone get the mashed potatoes?” And somehow Uncle Joe over in the corner of the table, so preoccupied with conversation, has a backlog of dishes accumulating around his plate. “Com’on Uncle Joe, keep passing the dishes.” Have you been there?

The story we have from the Bible today is a simple one; it is about passing the dishes. But a problem has developed. Remember, over the last two weeks we have encountered two passages in the bible that very clearly, very ideally, identify the core purposes of the church. From Matthew 28 there is a call to teach and baptize, spread the word. From Acts 2 we heard about devotion to apostle’s teaching, prayer, breaking of bread, fellowship and sharing as there is need.

In Acts 6 there is something akin to Uncle Joe holding up the dishes. The hold up was certainly not intentional, but there was enough of a problem to create complaint. Evidently the church was growing so rapidly, community life was getting frayed around the edges. The Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. It is assumed by many that this means distribution of food, although there are some, evidently referring to how everything was held in common back in Acts 2, that the distribution could also have been monetary support.²⁰ Whether the “waiting on table was literally like a bus boy in a restaurant at a

²⁰ *Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1971). 736.

community gathering, or other forms of distribution of what was needed by the widows, let's not get wrapped up in this detail. There is nothing to suggest a philosophical or doctrinal rift between people. This is a very practical matter.

The Book of Acts is not an idealized view of the church. It is a real view with real difficulties and real problems that needed to be overcome somehow. The importance of this passage is enormous. For today, like then, many of the decisions that are made in churches are NOT matters of life and death, are not grand theological discrepancies. Obviously this is a huge problem for the Grecian widows. But if you want a really huge problem, turn over to chapters 10–15 in Acts dealing with whether or not a gentile follower of Jesus needs to first become Jewish.

The problem in Acts 6 is small by comparison. But the implications are huge in how the early church community overcame their problems. When I look at this passage from the perspective of the pastor, I recall hundreds, if not thousands of hours of time invested in battling brush fires. I can relate well to the Twelve who said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” (vs. 2) The pastor in many churches becomes like Uncle Joe. All of a sudden you look up and all of the dishes are piled up at your end of the table and everyone is looking at you. This is not the design of the church.

It's similar to what Moses experienced in the Old Testament when his father-in-law Jethro came up to him (Ex. 18) and said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening? What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you

will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.”

There is a process that is followed in Acts 6. Step One: Verse one. There is a problem. It can be like any problem in any household, business, church. This is an applicable process just about anywhere. Identifying and recognizing there is a problem, and addressing that problem early on. We’ve already described the problem in Acts 6:1. Problem is, that many problems in life go unattended. It’s true that some things in life, in the grand scheme of things simply do not matter. I’ve grown fond of the expression, “Will anyone, including God, really care about this 50 years from now?” We tend to make mountains out of molehills, but also molehills out of mountains.

We tend also to get out of control when some problems. We do not let God control our self-control. And many problems escalate. There are many, many life lessons in these seven little forgotten verses. So we start with a problem that is recognized and willingly and opening encountered. There is no hiding, no sweeping under the carpet, there is open acknowledgment—we have a problem here.

Step two, verse two: We are already emerging into solution mode. The twelve disciples gather the other disciples, the wider community, and say, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” In other words, there is review of priorities and purpose. “Here’s this problem, let’s look at this problem from the perspective of our priorities and purpose. It sounds like core values to me. So, we are not going to proceed with solving this problem in some emotional knee jerk reaction, we are going to go back to our original purpose. Who are we? What are we about?”

I'm reminded of an old story about a police officer who was just outfitted with new glasses on the same day he had to re-qualify at the firing range. He went to the firing range, psyched himself out, started sweating, his new glasses began to fog up, and suddenly he remembered an old teacher of his, if you momentarily loose site of the target, don't forget your position.

What is our purpose, our position, and our core values? When problems come along, we are tempted to loose site of the target. The early disciples knew the most vital thing that needed to be done, was to ground themselves in their purpose or position.

Problem. Purpose. Possibilities.

Step Three: Verse 3: "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over the them." No doubt there was much more conversation about this than what we have recorded in this account. We do not have a full transcript of every word spoken. We have the vital elements laid out for us.

But they looked at the possibilities, guided by God, they did not decide on a course of action in a haphazard way. The Twelve, passed the dish along to the larger community and said, choose seven, probably a symbolic number, to do this important task. But not just any seven. We are not looking for warm bodies here, but people who are filled with Spirit and wisdom. In other words the twelve guided the larger community in delegating authority and giving *appropriate* people responsibility in carrying out ministry according to their giftedness.

Problem. Purpose. Possibilities. Pray.

Step Four, Verse 4: While the process is working the twelve give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. The primary purposes that provides the foundation for the church. Prayer under girds the entire functioning of the church. If the core of the church is not centered on prayer and the ministry of the word, the church spirals out of control, and gets caught up in brush fire after brush fire that emerge into fire storms. And I'm not talking about the fire of the Holy Spirit here. Human fires consume and destroy. Moses discovered that the fire of the Holy Spirit did not consume the bush, but gives power and energy.

Problem. Purpose. Possibilities. Prayer. Proposal.

Step five, verse 5: "This proposal pleased the whole group." A decision was made by the community, the appropriate people were selected. Ultimately some decision has to be made. In this particular case the whole group was pleased. You and I both know that many decisions are made where not everyone is pleased. In many cases, displeasure comes because the problem was not caught soon enough. In many cases, displeasure comes because the critical step 2, reviewing purpose did not happen.

When sifting through possibilities, and landing on a proposal, the proposal needs to be grounded in the purpose and in prayer. Those people who were selected for this ministry were prayed over, the apostles, that is the twelve, laid hands on them. Prayer went into the process and continued through the product.

That's six. *Problem. Purpose. Possibilities. Prayer. Proposal. Product.* In other words, what is the fruit that is produced from a decision? How do you know whether a decision turned out to be the right one after all? Even with this process, results are not

guaranteed. We also have to realize that what God wants produced and what we want produced may be different.

We can look at something and see nothing but failure and not recognize the change, the growth that has taken place within us. Perhaps a lesson finally learned. Acts 6 does not leave us guessing as to what was produced. Verse 7: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

Problem, purpose, possibilities, prayer, proposal, more prayer, and the product; this is not a step-by-step process to *guarantee* success according to worldly standards, but it is a process that can help us intentionally welcome God into the midst of everyday life. I believe we can apply this process to business, family, church, or even personal life.

**“The Value Giver”
I Corinthians 15:1-14
Preached on February 26, 2006**

Over the last eight weeks we have explored biblical examples of core values. We have sampled passages from the Old Testament, Gospels and New Testament letters.

- We encountered King Josiah, faced with a dilemma of enormous proportions, the holy temple filled with pagan gods. He cleaned house.
- Then there was Joshua, challenging the Hebrew people to focus upon the one true God. He called the people to covenant renewal.
- The Prophet Isaiah, appalled at the conduct of the people, appealed to holy living and a true fast in Isaiah 58. Jesus would use Isaiah’s prophecy as a foundation for his own ministry.
- And Paul writing to the Corinthian church, challenged the people to joyful generosity.
- Do you remember Jesus’ last words to us in his resurrection? His was a clarion call to carry on by going into every corner of the world teaching and baptizing confidently knowing He would be with us every step of the way.

- And we learned last week that the early church was not perfect, but the apostles continually appealed to prayer and the centrality of core values to work through problems.

Along the way we have heard the stories of particular churches as they struggled to live out their community life according to their core values.

- Remember Art's tough day? The church is NOT about preserving Art's parking spot or Art's pew. The church is God's for all God's people.
- Or how about the church that opted to build a chapel in Nyembo, Africa before their own building project—a church that learned to value mission above self.
- Or the church that placed a plumb line in the midst of the congregation in emphasizing their core value of social justice.
- Or, the church that renovated a \$1 closed church in the inner city to reach the hurting people of the city—a church that emphasized outreach and evangelism.

These churches, in their own specific ways live out what we learned in Acts 2 as the church devoted itself to teaching, prayer, fellowship, breaking bread, sharing resources. And because of that the church grew.

You can turn to any page of scripture and find an appeal to core values. It seems to me that we needed to return to the very core of core values. To the "Value Giver": God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Kerygma as theologian Rudolf Bultman suggested. We find the Value Giver at work when we read John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." But in what could be considered one of the earliest creedal statements, Paul captures this kerygma in I Corinthians 15.

Paul reminds the people of Corinth of the work of Jesus. This is of first importance. Those two words, "first importance" should really make us pay attention. (15:3) Paul is pulling together for the Corinthian people and us today, a synopsis, the kerygma of our faith.

Much like the Nicene or Apostle's Creed, Paul establishes the core facts upon which the Corinthian church needs to establish itself. Not upon the earlier quarrels

referred to in the opening passages of the letter. Not to the disputes as to whose giftedness is more effective or more important. What are the things, to Paul, that are of first importance: (15:3-4)

- That Christ died for our sins
- That he was buried
- That he was raised from the dead.

Paul will add, that without this, his preaching and his labor is in vain (15:14).

Great church leaders have taken up the cause of the Value-Giver concentrating on what is of first importance. Martin Luther took this to heart as he protested the direction the Roman Church in the Middle Ages by maintaining the centrality of faith and authority of scripture for the church. Similarly John Wesley, confronted the coldness of the Church of England during the 1700's proclaimed the need "to spread scriptural holiness" and that "the world is my parish." And, in the midst of great world upheaval and a German Church that had gone astray during World War 2, Carl Barth, the primary writer of the Barmen Confession attempted to refocus the church on Christ.

I'm curious what would be of first importance for us?

- Achievements
- Personal goals or objectives
- The attention I desire
- The fears that define me
- The stock market that I follow
- My job
- My habit
- My company
- My clubs
- My golf
- My time.

Essentially, it is about what we value. What are the guiding principles and motivations by which we live our lives? What can't we live without? There may be some very

wholesome answers: friends, family, faith. But if we were to be completely honest with each other, there may be other things that end up on our list.

I have heard some over the years tell me, “It really doesn’t matter what you have faith in, just so you have faith in something.” Well think about this:

- I can have faith in my car, but it has the potential of breaking down.
- I can have faith in my computer, but it could crash
- I can have faith in my friends, but there may be misunderstandings or betrayal. Just talk to Jesus about that one.
- I can have faith in myself, but I do not have all wisdom, power, or strength.

The Psalmist says it this way, (146:3) “Do not your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth. In that very day his plans perish.” This is the reminder of Ash Wednesday.

Paul says, “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins...” Is there anything in our life that can compare to that singular event in history? Paul goes on to say that in order for this singular event to connect with our lives, there is an encounter. (15:5)

- Jesus appeared to Peter
- He appeared to the twelve
- He appeared to more than 500
- He appeared to James
- He appeared to the Apostles
- He appeared to Me, Paul, last of all.

Paul, in his self-deprecating way, draws a dramatic comparison between what is of first importance, Jesus, and what is last, himself. Paul’s own encounter with the living Lord puts his life in perspective.

Have you had an encounter with the living Lord? There are some people in this world who only *refer* to Jesus, if at all.

- They will POP his name into conversation to make it sound holy

- They will use his name to PROMOTE their own cause.
- They will PROFANELY use his name to gain attention.

Yes, There are some people in this world who only refer to Jesus.

There are some people in this world who *confer* with Jesus.

- They will spend time with him
- They will even inquire as to what he would do. WWJD?
- They will read the gospels as a form of study as if to flatter Jesus.
- They will put on a show for other people or God.

But Jesus has said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, “Whoever hears these words of mine and does not act on them is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”

So we can refer to Jesus, we can confer with Jesus, but if he is going to be of first importance to you and this church, we must *defer* to Jesus.

- Turn your life over to Christ—Christ died for my sins!
- It’s asking “What would Jesus do?” and then do it!
- I feel this way, but your word tells me this.
- I think this is the right thing to do, but your Spirit tells me this

I am going to put myself aside for kingdom purposes.

On our driving about on Friday, we ran across a church sign that read something like this: “The Christian’s vitamin—B1!” The ones who defer, are the servants who make a difference in this world. And you don’t have to be great or well known to have Christ be of first importance to recognize Him as the Value Giver.

I recall meeting a team of volunteers at the Crystal Cathedral several years ago. We had just gathered for one of the worship services and I struck up a conversation with a group of ladies next to me. There were about five ladies. They were all very excited that I was there for classes and I inquired if they did any work around the cathedral. They got very excited. The lady next to me pointed around the vast cathedral, “You see all these

people gathering for worship.” I followed her hand around the cathedral. “Yes, isn’t it exciting?!”

She continued, “Our job is to stuff the thousands of bulletins each week with the inserts.” She could have stopped right there and I would have been impressed, but what she said next has never left me. This group of ladies knew the importance of what they were doing. She went on, “If we do not do this work, someone who needs to know about an AA meeting, a bible study, or some life changing workshop may never know.” Now there is someone who knows the Value Giver, who knows what is of first importance!

Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar, the General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ said, “If the church of God wants to get smaller, all it has to do is more of what it’s doing today.”²¹ How many churches quibble and quarrel about things that fifty years from now no one, not even God, is going to give one care. We need to be the church on fire!

South Bend, Michiana, needs this church to be on fire! Michiana needs a whole bunch of churches to be on fire. In that same service where I heard Dr. Edgar, the music leader sang a song written by Larnell Harris back in the 1980’s called “Questions.” The song went something like this: “There are so many questions I must ask myself today. What will I leave behind when life has passed? Will I leave a trace of Jesus somewhere? Have I been a light in this place, brought a smile to a sad face, shown the world that I care, lived my life the way Jesus dared, when someone stumbled was I there.”

It’s about keeping first things first.

- It’s not about me, but Christ.
- It’s not about my parking spot or pew, but about Christ-like hospitality

²¹ Bob Edgar, (untitled sermon delivered at United Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Intensive, 23 January 2006), Trotwood, OH.

- It's not about me, but about promoting Christ's love
- It's not about me, but about effectively serving others in Christ's name
- It's not about me, but about expressing Christ's compassions to those who are hurting
- It's not about me, but about sharing the power of Christ to a world at war with itself, others and God.

I will say it like Paul, my 25 years of preaching is in vain, I have wasted my breath and energy, if I do not share, remind you, implore you, hold you accountable to what is of first importance,

Christ died for our sins, was buried, and he rose again. Our Value Giver.

Prayer of commitment and altar call given.

APPENDIX D
PRIMARY CHURCH ILLUSTRATIONS

Arts Tough Day

First Church has steadily grown over a period of 5 years. Many credit the vision and leadership of the new pastor. This new pastor recalls an incident with one of his members:

One Sunday, Art approached me just as I was about to enter the sanctuary...and he was clearly not happy. His face was a suffused red, and his hands were clenching and unclenching.

Pastor, *you're* responsible for bringing all these new people into this church! You seem to think all this growth is a good thing. [We'll I'll tell you a few things . . . those screens in the sanctuary make us look like an electronics store. I can't stand the sight of those drums and listening to all this rock music . . . but this takes the cake!] Now there's somebody parked in my parking spot!" I thought for a moment – that's right – Art's the one who parks under the only shade tree in the entire parking lot. Everybody who's been a member knows that. And rather than deal with Art, they just let him park there. But some unknowing, unsuspecting newcomer, accidentally parked in his spot.

I looked at Art, glanced out at the sanctuary, and then looked at Art again. I sighed and said, "Art, I think you're going to have a really bad day." Art looked confused.

"Why is that, pastor?" he responded.

"Because," I said, "I think they're also sitting in your pew!"¹

The Nyembo Story

In 1991 Hanfield UMC had gone to two services," writes their pastor. "By 1992 we had out grown our facility again. We had classes meeting in every room, closet, and boiler room—we even had a class meeting on the landing of the basement steps. Our Building Study Committee had taken several field trips, planning on a building expansion project for our current site. However we were land locked and our neighbors would not sell us land. In addition, our community was located literally in a cornfield, miles from any population center.

It was in this period of time when [a missionary] spoke at a men's prayer breakfast. He shared with us his vision for building a conference center in central Africa. It would be a place for youth camps, training seminars, agricultural and medical workshops, and pastors' training school. It would be an entire campus, patterned after Epworth Forest, located near the village of Nyembo. After the breakfast, the missionary privately mentioned to me the possibility of Hanfield UMC raising the funds for the Nyembo Chapel. The cost of the chapel would be \$12,000. I thought to myself, "We need someone to give *us* \$12,000. We don't need to be giving other people money right now."

¹ Kent R. Hunter, *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up With God's Vision* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 2002) 31. Used by permission.

While at Senior High Bible Conference in August of 2002, I was praying during one of the evening services. I sensed the Holy Spirit say: "Before you build the church at Hanfield, build the chapel at Nyembo." I replied, "No, that's not what we want to do." After a prolonged argument with the Lord, I finally said, "Yes, Lord."

The Hanfield Building Study Committee was actually thrilled with this new vision. Along with the Missions Committee, we began to raise the funds for the Nyembo chapel. It took one and a half years. It took an additional one and a half years to raise funds to send a team of five to Congo (then Zaire) for the dedication of the chapel.

In these 3 years, the Lord opened the opportunity for us to buy ground. We believe we have reaped this excellent location now, because we had sown in the African church earlier.²

The Plumb Line Church

Wheadon UMC, located in the midst of one of the Midwest's most diverse cultural and academic areas, has many university and seminary professors as part of their membership. Often a prophetic voice in the community, Wheadon UMC tangibly demonstrated this by dropping a plumb line from the central beam of the sanctuary into the midst of the people who worship in the round. This provides a constant reminder of the prophetic messages of the Old Testament. Their facility is also used as an actual sanctuary for political refugees from Central America. And, a large exterior sign identifies the church property as a "Nuclear Free Zone" with the international "no" symbol imposed over a bomb. In 2004 Wheadon UMC merged with a nearby UMC with similar values. The merged church currently utilizes both of their value statements to direct ministry and is in process of working on a united statement.

The ten point Wheadon UMC portion of the core value statement reads as follows:

We believe in God who is within us and beyond us: We claim God's power for our daily lives and affirm God's grace sustaining us to meet the overwhelming needs of the world. Confessing our human imperfection, we commit ourselves to participating in God's transforming acts which move us toward justice and God's promise of the New Earth.

We are committed to a worship celebration: that includes Biblical, prophetic preaching, life-giving sacraments, and congregational prayer and dialogue. In keeping with the tradition of John Wesley, we are committed to individual and communal transformation, self-examination and growth through experience, spiritual disciplines, and social action.

We are committed to the ministry of the laity: We claim our individual vocational callings and commit ourselves to lay leadership in our worship, wide participation, and consensus decision making in all community matters.

We are committed to an inclusive diverse community: We celebrate the gifts of men, women and children of all ages, and individuals of all races, ethnic backgrounds

² Used by permission, Hanfield United Methodist Church, Hanfield, IN.

and sexual orientations. We support each other on our life-long spiritual journeys. We seek to be inclusive in our language, attitudes and actions.

We are committed to our witness as a reconciling congregation: We celebrate the full participation of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered persons and their families in the life of our congregation. We witness against heterosexism in the larger church and community.

We are committed to healing personal and institutional racism: within our community and beyond it. We seek to be racially and ethnically inclusive, to engage in study and dialogue on racism, and to ally ourselves with those who suffer from racist violence and discrimination, collaborating with others working for this purpose.

We are committed to working for political and economic justice: We work on behalf of victims of oppression within our community and around the world. This has included making our church a sanctuary for political refugees from Central America. We pledge ourselves to work for fair wages, food, housing, health care, and education for all.

We are committed to an ecological wholeness: for the planet that respects the sacredness of nature. We continue to examine the ecological consequences of our individual and corporate lifestyles, as we work for sustainable development.

We are committed to work for peace with justice: We promote reconciling, nonviolent, negotiated settlement to conflicts whenever possible. We seek to transfer destructive military technology and spending to creative, life-affirming purposes. We have declared our church a nuclear weapons-free zone.

We seek more people to share our journey of discipleship: and to impact the larger world. We want to share our belief that faith lived with passion in community is sustaining and motivating.

In this and in all things, we open ourselves to the signs of God which lead us where we did not plan to go.³

The \$1 Vision

The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, a large, multi-staffed church, had experienced a rapid succession of senior pastors over a period of three years. A well beloved senior pastor, who helped to lead the church through a period of rapid growth and building program, received another appointment. Church attendance reached over 1,000. The church received a new senior pastor in 2000 and another in 2001. Neither lasted more than a year. The District Superintendent and a retired bishop helped to lead the church in periods of transition. Serious morale issues developed within the membership and staff during this period of instability. Also during this period the staff-parish committee determined to create a new staff structure on a corporate model. And, a small group of staff and leaders seized an opportunity to define three core values for the church: "attract, build and utilize disciples for Jesus Christ." In early spring 2002 yet another senior pastor arrived. Attendance and finances slumped. Confusion existed in the

³ Used by permission, Wheadon United Methodist Church. This congregation, once located in Evanston, IL, has merged with another congregation in Chicago.

staff as to new lines of organization. Lack of understanding prevailed within the congregation concerning the new core value statement.

In the midst of this upheaval, The Good Shepherd Church had an opportunity to purchase a former UMC church and property. It had been the dream of the first senior pastor mentioned above to establish a second site to reach out to those in the inner city. The church was purchased for \$1. Considerable amount of interior work was needed to bring the building up to standard. A team of craftsman from the church went to work on the sanctuary and classrooms. The site opened the fall of 2001 as Open Arms and attracted a small multi ethnic group. The intent of the original dream was to operate as one church at two locations. The main campus provided the bulk of the financial support (\$100,000 annually) and staffing for Open Arms, but the absence of the original visionary pastor, and ensuing volatility in pastoral leadership, created confusion as to the purpose of the second campus. As the church began to encounter financial problems, many questioned the wisdom of the dream. Some called for the second site to be “launched out on its own to see if it would even survive.

With the arrival of the latest senior pastor in 2002, new emphasis was placed on Open Arms being a primary example of the core value “attracting.” Problem was, most people did not know or understand what the core values were. How could they know they were even participating in advancing a ministry that was supposedly close to their own heart? Concerted effort was made in establishing close and strong ties to the main campus. Preaching staff was shared. Regular reports of successes were communicated to the membership of the church.

After three more years, new leadership, and a strong vision for growth, events converged that would make Open Arms a truly vibrant multi-ethnic site. An Hispanic UMC ministry needing to find a new home was incorporated into Open Arms. Recently another struggling church outside of the UMC has just joined the fold of Open Arms This once struggling ministry is dramatically growing and has moved to holding two services. Open Arms remains the second campus of The Good Shepherd UMC with no attempt at dividing the two sites. Staff and financial support are still shared.

In the midst of these years, the church has come to grips with a deeper understanding of what it means to attract people to Christ. It is not so much about “coming” as it is about “going” into the community. Good Shepherd UMC now has several significant new outreaches into the community. A local university recently became a residential campus and the church intentionally reaches out to students on campus through staff and ministries. Upward Basketball and Soccer have been added to the ministry offerings. Excitement builds for these new ministries as hundreds of new individuals and families are being touched with the Gospel message.⁴

⁴ Used by permission , The Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Fort Wayne, IN.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS AND TRANSCRIPTS

Focus Group One
“A Tale of Two Kings” January 8, 2006
Matthew 2:1-12/ 2 Kings 22-23

Ref. # 3/10/18//7¹

Getting Started:

How do you generally respond to change of any sort?

How do you generally respond to changes in the church?

If Art had confided in you his feelings about his church, what would you tell him?

Digging Deeper:

Let's take a look again at the stories of Josiah and Herod, our two kings featured in today's message.

Describe what is going on in each situation, who the main players are, and the main activity that is taking place.

What do you believe were the core values motivating each of these kings?

Application:

How do you believe these stories relate to our day today?

Name one or two changes that would make Evangel Heights a better church. What would you not change?

Transcript of Focus Group One
“Tale of Two Kings”
Matthew 2:1-12 and 2 Kings 22-23
January 8, 2006

[Researcher's notes: the names of the respondents are not always clear, especially in the first tape, and are marked “??.” The use of the word “inaudible” refers to indistinguishable segments on the tapes. We make no attempt to change respondent's usage of the English language. The thoughts contained in these transcripts do not always concur with those of the researcher.]

JS: How do you respond to change?

¹ Each focus group correlates to questions on the survey and questionnaire. The numbers prior to the double slash marks relate to questions on the survey; numbers after the double slash marks, to the questionnaire.

Response: Acceptance.

JS: Then we accept change?

Response: Question.

JS: We question change?

Response: I question whether it is positive or negative change.

Response: I'm hesitant.

Response: It depends on how it will affect me.

ME: I roll with the punches. Whatever it is I do, man.

Response: I still question change.

JS: How do you generally respond to changes in the church?

TM: I think we spend a lot of time talking about change, but we do not do them. The changes that are made are ones that are not really going to make a difference. We have a committee for this and a committee for that. Basically they are meeting without having any substance coming out at the end.

Response: So how you perceive the change, whether you think the change is important or not, may be the same perception by someone else.

Response: Why we have to change, and who is wanting the change, and who is pushing for the change is important—the squeaking gear gets the grease.

Response: The only real change is the pastors.

Response: The lack of consistency in our changes is the reason that we need change. We have been so inconsistent about our change that we have not had a consistent process of what we do want to change or not want to change. So, if there is anything that needs to change, it is the fact that we have no consistency in what we do. There has been a lack of what we do for change.

CM: One other thing about that is probably important to define change. Because it does not necessarily mean that you stop doing one thing and start doing another, which immediately puts you at ill of ease or off guard. But I am thinking about all the changes that have been made that have occurred recently that are additions to what we already do. For example, the Longest Night Service, which by the way also turned out to be a great PR tool, and the Lamb Ministry. These are changes, but are additions. So change does not necessarily imply that you are losing something.

Response: I don't know how many of you have read the book *Who Moved My Cheese*, but the book says that many changes we think are bad for us, may actually be good for us.

Response: You have to have a vision to make changes toward that goal.

Response: However, not everyone has the same vision. Some have a global vision while others have a local geographical area vision.

JS: So if Art confided in you his feelings about his church, what would you tell him?

LM: So being a person that has been on the other side of Art's discussion, that has taken the place of a person like Art, it is an uncomfortable feeling. It is uncomfortable because the person lets you know in no uncertain terms that you are in their place. So that is as equally as uncomfortable as making Art change. So, I think I would talk to Art in that regard. We need to tell Art that it feels very unfriendly when it is said that "this is where I sit and this is where I have always sat."

JS: So, L. are you saying that someone has approached you about sitting in their pew?

LM: Not recently, but it has happened and it has happened to my mom too!

CM: Oh! Here?

LM: They did not say, "Get out," but they did say, "That is where I sit."

Response: Did you move?

LM: Yeah, I did. My Mom did too. It was not a mean thing but, "That's where I always sit."

JS: So you would tell Art what?

LM: That if I knew . . . I think it should be up to Art to welcome me rather than me trying to decide where I should sit. If you are new coming in or a visitor or whatever, it should not matter where you sit. But there are people that really like to sit where they have always sat.

TM: Art should be told that this is a church for everybody and there are no assigned seats. You are not going to be able to spread the word of Christ in order to grow without this attitude. One of the nice things was that when I first came to this church everybody was really nice. What made this church open was the friendliness and if this is lost, you will lose what this church is all about.

Response: I am looking or thinking about the wrist band "What would Jesus do?" And I am thinking if there is room in the pew we could say, "Slide on down and sit with me."

Response: Our role in life is to be as much [inaudible].

JS: What else would you say to Art?

Response: Lighten up!

MD: I feel badly that you are hurt or you feel anxious, but maybe next week you will have your seat back or your parking space back.

Response: Come earlier.

Response: We must remember that Art came to us and is talking to us in confidence and not anybody else.

PD: Art is opposed to change.

Response: Why don't you come and sit with me? I was told that where I was sitting was another person's seat and I had to move.

MD: I don't think you had to move. I think what you were told was that the seat was someone else's. I don't think you had to move.

JS: What else would you say to Art?

Response: Sit somewhere else.

MD: I think I would be a little more soft with him to begin with and kind if he confided those feelings to me, put my arm around him or touch him. I would also say "Let's talk about it or work it out if we can." I would not push him off and I don't think I would just say, "Go sit somewhere else."

Response: I think I would ask him if he would be willing to give his seat to me.

MD: You would say that with love.

JS: Let's take a look again at the story of Josiah and Herod, our two kings featured in today's message. Describe what is taking place in each situation, who the main players are, and the main activity that is taking place.

ME: Josiah, Hilkiah the high priest, and the person who found the book.

JS: What is Josiah doing?

Response: Trying to make changes.

Response: Getting rid of the Asherah poles.

Response: Trying to follow God.

Response: Wants to do right in the sight of God.

CM: He is presiding over a kingdom where, way before his time, they lost their vision and everything fell apart. With the change of each generation and people dying off, the vision was completely forgotten.

Response: God was forgotten. God is the lead character in the story!

SK: They got desensitized. Three-hundred years before, King David was close to God but 300 years later they have come so far away from him. The information was not being passed on to each generation; 300 years later they didn't even know the Bible was missing. It is like the people who were looking for the covenant or Torah did not even know that they were supposed to be looking for it. I wish I knew where to find this, but they were told or someone was told that they were not to go to the right or to the left. At some point somebody went to the right or went to the left and those changes were built on rather than on the truth and the word of God. I think that the local church or the church universal at this time are in danger of that a lot, because we very often go to the right or to the left so we lose focus.

CM: That's a really good point. Have you ever heard of the 5 percent course? There is this little theory that if you change course just a little and you chart it out on a graph, over the course of time, you end up with this colossal change. I bet you 300 years earlier somebody thought if we just change it just a little bit, it's not a big deal, it's not going to make a big difference, and it's not going to upset the apple cart. Three-hundred years later what you have is a church or a kingdom where nobody even knows that the Bible is missing. I can even picture that 5 percent.

SK: Two thousand years later the church is nothing like it was in Acts. Because somebody didn't like the candles on the altar, we have millions of different denominations.

TM: We have a lot of people who look at the Bible and don't take it as gospel. They think it is fable or folktale. It's like you said C. about 5 percent, it's no big deal; it's a story.

JS: What is going on with Herod?

CM: When Herod found out this news, was he surprised? Had he read the scriptures? Did he know anything about the earlier prophets? Did this come as a surprise to him or was it all new information? Did he have some sense that it might be happening?

Response: I think everybody basically knew the Messiah was coming based on what happened after the Messiah came.

CM: So this was not brand new information?

Response: No, that is why he was so concerned and scared about this king.

Response: He feels intimidated by the birth of the Christ-child.

JS: What do you believe were the core values motivating these kings?

Response: Josiah's core value was to find the will of God and try to figure out how to do it. Herod's core values were power and fear. He was haughty and above God's law. It's the beginning of sin when you think you are God.

Response: Josiah humbled himself before the Lord.

Response: One's humble and the other is haughty!

JS: How do these stories relate to our day today?

Response: I believe that our whole existence, as I look at my religion, my belief, my family, and my church, are based on faith. If you don't have faith

Response: We are going along the same routes in that we have false gods and we have power that is more important than God.

CM: I think this relates to Art! The person that has humility is forced to respond to Art differently. You don't have a choice, despite what you would like to say.

JS: Name one or two changes that would make Evangel Heights a better church.

Response: Not change the pastor. [Agreeing nods throughout the room.]

CM: I feel we are on a roll. Does anybody else feel that we are really on a roll lately?

JS: A roll of what?

CM: A roll of change and additions that do not feel threatening, or leading us astray. They are pleasant and not irritating people.

TM: I think there are some major things that hold us back.

[Pause]

PP: "What's holding us back?"

TM: [Shakes his head, does not want to answer]

[Pause]

LM [wife of TM]: If I were to answer some of his feelings, I think that music needs to be changed. That's one aspect of worship that needs to be changed.

JS: How?

LM: More contemporary. I know we need hymns and I like hymns, but I like music that I know as well.

Response: I think there's momentum and energy.

[tape ends]

Focus Group Session Two
"House Rule: God Rules" January 15, 2006
Joshua 24

Ref. # 1/15//5/9

Getting Started:

Can you relate a time you went along with the crowd?

After the fact did you question the crowd's (and your) actions?

What things do you do, or process do you go through to make a truly important decision?

Digging Deeper:

The covenant renewal experience found in Joshua 24 is one of the most dramatic accounts in all scripture. What do you recall as significant parts of this event?

How do you believe Joshua came to his core value conclusion, "As for me and my house."? What did he base his decision on? What evidence do you see in Joshua 24? Are there other values you perceive in this passage?

What do you believe Joshua was doing in repeatedly pressing for an answer from the people?

Application

What is of highest importance to you? To Evangel Heights? For what do you believe Evangel Heights is known?

What role does the pastor have in shaping the values of the church?

Transcript of Focus Group Two
“House Rule: God Rules”
Joshua 24
January 15, 2006

LM: First question. Can you relate a time you went along with the crowd?

LM: Uh, I will tell you that prior to becoming a Christian, and I am not saying I have not done this since then, but that is all I did. I don't think I really had an opinion. If I did, I didn't voice it very frequently. Uh, I pretty much, if I did disagree I'd kind of just hang back and wait to see if anybody else would disagree and then I might say something depending on who I was with, but things have changed.

TM: I would second that.

LM: Things have changed.

TM: I second that part about voicing an opinion.

LM: Does anyone else want to touch on going along with the crowd?

ME: I would like to say that I have tried to buck the crowd as much as I possibly can and that has not worked out for me very well either.

TC: Especially when I immigrated to America, I left all of my friends back home, but I had to make new friends. I went along with the wrong people.

PD: Depending on the situation you could be forced to go along with the crowd.

PP: What sort of situation?

PD: Well, depending on the job situation you have to try to cuddle up to the people that are going to be evaluating you, you know; that kind of stuff.

CM: There is another aspect of going along with the crowd that might not be quite as obvious and that is the fact that, uh, by doing nothing you are guilty by association. Someone sent me an e-mail recently and down at the bottom it said, “The best way for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing.” So you may not go along, but if you do not buck, then you, as my mother used to say, “If you are not part of the [inaudible], then you are not part of the solution.” Being on the fence may not be the solution.

MD: Boy that really takes courage I think.

PP: Are there positive and negative ways of going along with the crowd? Think about, I'm getting ahead of myself, the Joshua story.

TM: I think there are situational situations where going along is a positive thing and there are other situations that are not. It depends on where you are and what you are doing. As long as you are going along and you know you are doing the right thing, sometimes you pray about it and you know that you are being led and it doesn't involve your moral ethics and all that, and you believe it. Then going along with the crowd is okay. You go along with the crowd and you know it's not right and you have this uneasy feeling, then this is where you should not go along with it.

CG: I think one of the biggest influences is the crowd you choose to be with. I can think when I was raising my children I encouraged them and sometimes they did not follow my encouragement to be with the youth group. And I know there were good and bad kids both, but they had a better chance of achieving good if they were with that crowd. And so I think that a lot of where we end up and the choices we that we are given, the opportunities we are given, depends on the crowd we choose.

ME: Not to negate what you are saying, because it is not where I am coming from, it is just that in the instance of Christ and being Christ-like, we should not forego the opportunity to be in a situation where there are people in need; give and take.

LM: Uh, what things do you do or process do you go through to make a truly important decision?

TM: For me, if I know that something is just not right, I am not going to do it. I'm just not, uh . . . sometimes if I am just not sure. I may go along with it until it comes to a point where you need to make a decision. Sometimes I think we need to step back and I know that sometimes we don't have all that much time to do it. But sometimes your instincts are God-breathed and you know that God is giving you a little warning there.

CG: I was thinking about the sermon . . . "All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial," and I can think of times in my life when I can rationalize the benefit of doing something that I can't now at this time. Now at this point in my life it was appropriate or God's will that I do it. But I rationalized at that time. And, uh, it was a choice I made and there were consequences, and the choices that we make aren't, in and of themselves, all that we have to deal with, all that comes with it, results [inaudible]. And one of the things in my Bible study devotion that I have really focused on is an eternal perspective. So that where I am faced with choices and they seem good right now and I can rationalize why they would be good right now and what benefit they would have not only for me but to somebody else that, uh, from an eternal perspective, do they still hold the water?

MD: We talked about this in our Wednesday study one time. Uh, I believe that a lot of the decisions we have to make are very quick. We don't have time to just sit down and pray about it and of course it is the other way too. We do have to make decisions that we do have time to sit down and pry and make certain that we are doing what God wants us to do. But the quick decisions, uh, I believe, that if we are in the continual attitude of prayer like we are supposed to be that I think God honors those decisions. And I think most of the time they are proper and right.

LM: I agree, and then because I have made those same decisions because I feel the same way that—I don't know what a lot of people call those quick prayers we shoot up to God in those times—when we want to make a decision and make a good one but being in an attitude of prayer all the time, you know really does help. Although I do think that, uh, when we make a decision and it is not the right one I think a lot of times God will reveal that as well. I am not saying that he doesn't honor it. I've made decisions and I have prayer about it, you know, when you hurry up and made a decision and then as you go along maybe this decision was not the best decision I could have made, so now what? And I think God reveals that as well. You know, the “now what?” Okay what are you going to do and he can guide you better or out of that. That is where grace comes in.

BB: When the pastor was talking today about who or what are the gods in our lives, the abuses we carry along from our childhood, makes it very difficult sometimes for me. Mine was verbal. It was a verbal abuse, and I was afraid to make a decision. And I did just what Clyde was saying. Instead of making a decision, I was led along. And then the consequences would come and then it was very dire because I was too afraid to step out. Those abuses, man, they hold you until you get rid of them. Even now, even once in a while, that little ugly snake pops its head up (I don't know if I will make it through what I am trying to say), because I am afraid of the punishments I will receive for the decision I will make for thinking on my own. Instead of thinking like someone thinks I should think. So, this is very difficult thing when you are making a decision because you hold on to other things that influence you besides that one decision.

ME: In regard to some of the things that were said, there are a couple of biblical people that jump into mind, uh, one is Jonah and how I think it is interesting how I think most of the time we look at Jonah and say he made a bad decision about running away from what God told him to do. But I think it is interesting that Jesus brings up before he is crucified that there will be no sign except for the sign of Jonah, in reference to being in the belly of the whale for three days. So, in my mind I am going well. If it was so far away from God's will why would God allow Jesus to refer to it? I just think it is interesting in regard to making quick decisions. Peter jumped out of the boat and started walking. Is that a good decision to just jump out of the boat and start walking on water? Maybe it wasn't the best natural human decision. But we got a wonderful glimpse of who God is. Then there is Job, which all of his friends said that he must have sinned to be receiving all this. Then God says, “Were you there in the beginning when I created the world.” Some of those things you just can't question, you just go forward. You just have to have faith.

TC: Some of the decisions should be based on the principles of the Word of God and common sense . . . the resources that we have to make these decisions by the Holy Spirit and principles.

ME: One of the important things you were saying is to have that base of knowledge of actual study of the Word so when you have those things occur, when you do not have that much time to pray about, but you will have the precepts from the Word of God.

LM: We need to move on because we are running out of time. The covenant renewal experience found in Joshua 24 is one of the most dramatic accounts in all scripture. What do you recall as significant parts of this event?

UK: Recounting of all God has done.

LM: Okay.

KL: God is in there. God hadn't moved.

LM: Recounting what the pastor said that each time Joshua asked, you know, again and again to respond, you know, "Is this who you going to follow?" Then pretty much, put it into action. No longer lip service, you need to put it into action.

ME: Therefore, reject the other gods, and know what are other gods.

FAC: How do you believe Joshua came to his core value conclusion "As for me and my house?" How did he come to that decision?

BB: I believe that he had come to this decision long before he used these words.

FAC: How?

BB: How? Well, he was brought up in slavery with Moses, and he and Caleb were the only two who stood up to the rest of the group and said, "No! We should go in" and the rest were too afraid to do anything. He had a very strong faith in God. He knew who he was following. He knew who it was he had his eyes on. His faith grew and each time God showed himself. Even when they went into the Promised Land, God was always marching ahead of them and Joshua saw that.

ME: In regards to the other story of the other Jews in the concentration camp, I think it is the Shema, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It is the basic simple foundation for every one of our lives. I think he was bringing it all back to that. Just saying that that is the way it is.

CL: Joshua is the leader.

CM: Joshua would not have been the leader if he had not had the faith. It would not have been the House of Joshua if Joshua had not followed God. You know what I mean? At the very beginning he followed. You know what I'm saying?

CL: No, I don't know what you are saying.

CM: If Joshua was unfaithful from the beginning, would he have been the leader? I am just saying, back there in that time it was the House of Joshua, you know, he was the patriarch, whatever. Right now it's the Landis House, just us five. Back then you lived

with your mom and dad and your grandparents. Whatever my dad said still loomed over me, you know, of my grandfather if he were alive.

BB: If Joshua was the head of the family he was saying my family is going to follow God because, Shema, this is what I am going to be teaching my family, Shema, this is where we are going.

TC: Core values called integrity.

LM: I think you got some of that, too, like when Moses was dying or before Moses was dying back in Deuteronomy, uh, what he said was what I am commanding you is not too difficult or beyond your reach. The word is very near you, it is in your mouth, it is in your heart, so you may obey it and at the very end he says, “now choose life,” so that you and your children may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying Him, and holding fast to Him. For that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. So, before Joshua took leadership he heard these words from Moses—reinforcing his core values.

MD: Back and forth, too. We need to reinforce, we need to encourage, we need to . . .

KL: Hold people accountable.

SK: Ultimately what it comes down to is what the pastor talked about, personal choice. You know, I mean Joshua said, he laid all these things out. He said, you know, this is what my family is going to do. What if Matt’s choice, whatever he chooses for his family to do the same thing? It is his choice to choose whether he wants the same thing. All Joshua is saying is “here’s the stuff.” I can’t make you believe what I believe but this is what I am going to do and this is why I am going to do it.

LM: This is important—this is why, rather than I am not telling you to do this, because I think this. These are all the reasons that I think it.

LM: What do you think Joshua was doing in repeatedly pressing for an answer from the people?

?: He asked four times!

BB: Because he was trying to get them from a mob mentality to being individuals—where is your heart?

LM: Anybody else?

BV: Well about the mob issue, it goes back to the Jesus issue when the mob wanted to stone the prostitute, adulterer. He just made one statement, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” They all stand there dumbfounded. One question dissipated that

crowd. It dissolved the animosity they had or at least it reflected upon themselves their core values.

CM: Yet in John, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" He really wanted him to be sure. I think this is what Joshua is saying, "Don't just say yes, this is not just a yes or no. You better think about this, because you are making a commitment."

BV: This is an important question to make people think.

CM: It is not an easy answer. It is easy to say yes, but hard in the doing.

LM: What is of highest importance to you? To Evangel Heights? For what do you believe Evangel Heights is known?

ME: I think it is important for us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and might and move on.

TM: For me the most important thing for Evangel Heights would be to be biblically based, scripturally based. And I think when we were talking, I think Evangel Heights needs to be scripturally based more than anything.

MB: I think that Evangel Heights needs to be reality based because all of us are on different point of our spiritual walk and there are the dangers of being totally scripturally based is you go too far to one side and then people who are not absolutely convinced of the whole process you lose those people. This is part of the church's mission. So, if the theory in all the stuff behind the Bible is I think where the core values are: the outreach, in my opinion, in a reality-based mission of this church and that is why I am here. Because as most of you know, I pretty much say whatever I think. Nobody has thrown me out of church yet!

JS: The social relevance is what I think you said?

MB: The personal social relevance.

ME: And I like the way he [pastor] used computer language because I am very computer oriented.

BB: I think the core values need to be taught from the children on up. Learn those things so that we have a strong foundation. It can still be relevant to where we are today. It has to be outreach because that is part of the whole thing. You learn the basics and then you move in that direction. Because one you have God solidly in your heart, your next action is naturally going to be outreach.

TM: Going along with M., being scripturally based is what we should do but I think, I am not saying we have to go out and be Bible-thumpers, but we still have to be scripturally based and slowly bring it to people. I remember in my first Disciple study when I read the

Old Testament it is like, whoa, this God is not a nice person that I have heard about. It is a slow process. You have to bring it to them in their walk, but you still stay true to scripture, not watering it down.

?: The point is, despite the delivery, the message doesn't change.

SK: Right! I think that there is where you know. I totally agree with what T. has said about focus—needs to be scripturally-based. I have appreciated Pastor Pat in the past couple of weeks being in the Bible, so much, as opposed to just scripture time. We read the scripture and then we hear a message. The fact that he goes back to that repeatedly, encourages us to follow in our Bible because, to be honest, I learned more about Josiah last week than I ever knew. Because that is not one of the stories I am going to be reading about in my Bible. That is not one of the stories I am going to pick out. So I think that the fact so much Scripture and the biblical basics are coming out from the pastor. It gives us as a congregation the opportunity to see things in the Bible we all know, the crucifixion, Peter walking on water, etc., but there are a lot of things in the Scriptures that get passed over that are important, that are relevant. And, you know, whether my idea of how I take that story last week, it may not mean much to a lot of people, but if we don't have anybody in authority saying to us to think about these things. Then it is up to you to process it and get going. The bottom line is what is in the Bible is the main thing. Where it goes from there is the choice of the person.

CM: Do you think we have ever done that?

MD: I think we have done that a lot here.

CM: I think we have always been a Bible-believing church. I don't think there has ever been a Sunday when a scripture hasn't been read.

SK: I am saying that that is one of our *strong points*. But there is a difference between reading Scripture on Sunday morning and be done with it and feel that you want to continue.

CM: That has nothing to do with the core value of the church I don't think. I think the core value has always been there. The difference I think you are talking about is the application of the sermon. You all remember when D. B. preached a sermon on abortion? It was wild! It was, I mean, what topic could you possibly choose to get people more fired up and get at each other, alienated, uh, or just hot. And it was remarkable. I'll always remember because he went right to the Bible for the answers. Now ultimately, he sort of left it to you to make your decision. But he did just what, uh, Joshua did. He said this is what God has said about all of these things, and these are the things you need to consider as you make your decision. And I think that is always what happens, and I think again on what everybody is talking about is the difference between having a pastor whose delivery you prefer and does a better job at making it socially relevant, uh, what you are talking about T. is that you came in as maybe a Christian who didn't know how strong in your faith or maybe you wanted your faith to grow. But we all had opportunities to

[inaudible] in the church. But that had nothing to do with whether we are Bible-believing or not. It had to do with whether we had a pastor who

TM: No.

CM: Who did a good job of making the message and the Scripture for that particular Sunday relevant to us?

TM: I agree to a point, Clyde, but what I am talking about, yeah, it really is for a lot of ministers to read the scripture, as Sherry has said, and I think it is their approach that some pastors have said the Scriptures and there is no more pulling from the Bible. You know, story after story.

CM: I don't have my glasses on so I am not hearing what you are saying [laughter].

LM: It goes to the question what role the pastor has in shaping the values of the church.

ME: I think that this is, uh, the most important thing is the Holy Spirit in the individual. No matter what I listen in. I have listened to Metallica and gotten truth out of it because of the Holy Spirit working in pulling real life, uh, biblical truths. I can find God's truth in just about every situation.

LM: Alright, but as a pastor

ME: Like I said, the Holy Spirit is specific to each person. The pastor's job is to make certain that he is relating information, biblically based information, socially relevant, and let the Holy Spirit deal in each person. You may, as somebody new in the Christian faith may not have had a Holy Spirit understanding necessarily of a particular passage. Whereas the longer you are there the Holy Spirit teaches you. The more meat you are able to pull out, the whole bread, milk and meat thing.

CG: I think as a newcomer here of the strengths of this church, Pastor Pat, whose commitment to say what God put on his heart. And then I think that his roles and, uh, and then it is trusting, anybody can say something and three different people will tell you three different things they said. And letting the Holy Spirit use those words and, uh, that is being created about how to do that from the littlest making that relevant to them not giving them some high holy speech they can't understand, but being at their level. I think that this is a huge strength. The church I came from in Waukarusa, one of the pastors was very good at that and one of the others was not. And you could see the difference in the kids eyes when they were listening. And I think that that knowing for the pastor to know the people he is shepherding and know what their needs are and to have a sense for if we are all safe or if one of us is out and may need an arm around to bring them back in. And, uh, to be open to God's moving in that way because it might not be looking that way right now. But for a pastor to have a heart for God that he will, you know, if one of his sheep is doing a "baaa" thing over here in a bush he is going to listen to that and bring them back.

LM: Sherry said it is important to have a person in authority to be scripturally based. To know the Bible that he can explain it so it is relevant. This is why it is still relevant to us and I am going to tell you I am going to talk about Josiah and I am going to talk about Joshua and I am going to tell you because he is led by God to tell us why it is still relevant. Timothy and I have talked a long time about how from very young a lot of our youth don't see the relevance of the Bible today and it is because we are not teaching them. And it is not coming from the authority.

CL: The pastor is not the authority. The pastor is the resource person.

LM: Well I think he is the authority.

CL: Well that is my point, he is the resource person, and in shaping core values that needs to come from the church and the church is not the pastor.

BV: I look at it like the church is not a house of saints, but a hospital for sinners. And when you go to a doctor you want to tap his knowledge to know what is wrong with you. You want him to know his medicine very well so he can tell what is wrong with you and cure you. I think we all are coming here to be cured because we are all sinners. We look for a leader who is biblically based and knows the Bible and can impart to us information to better serve Christ and be a better person to help others around you – socially relevant. So like I say, when you go to a doctor you hope they know their stuff very well and get pointed in the right direction.

CL: Unfortunately, Pastor Pat may be the only person and I may not agree with some of his theology. You know I might have a different views and I should feel that I can disagree with him.

CB: As people of God, we are people of free will and free choice and it is not Pat's job to tell us what to think it is his job to give us information so we can make our own decisions.

BV: That's what I have in my practice. I have clients come to me and I will suggest what we should do. If they do not agree, I tell them you are paying me and I will do it your way, but I will tell you what is going to happen. Pastor Pat is the same.

MG: Going along with that, this is what I pass along to my classes at Bethel College I teach. Every class ends the same, "Be to those around you God or Jesus and at that point, in every thing you do or say." And that is what I think the pastor in any church needs to do. Because in the long run whether you like it or not he or she, depending upon who is here, we look to the type of leadership. And I have all kinds of stories because back when I was a kid we had a minister that should not have been in the ministry. He damaged a lot of people.

LM: Well I think you do come for truth because it is no social club. If you just want a social aspect and get people's opinion . . . you come to church for truth. Or I do.

ME: I think one of the basic points for having an effective pastor is having a pastor who has the humility and understanding to delegate responsibility and to shepherd and to know what sheep do what, where, and be able to encourage that. Maybe not all pastors are the best delegators or the best organized people. Maybe they are just the love type shepherds and that is fine, too, but I think one of the things that makes a very effective pastor is the pastor who knows his sheep and knows how to know you...when I know my sheep likes that kind of grass over there and put them over there.

CM: It's important not to confuse authority with leadership. And I acknowledge that the pastor is the church leader. I am not sure, based upon what I have heard here, that I would acknowledge that the pastor is the moral authority because it may degrade some of the people in the church who perhaps have more of that. I'm going back to DB again. Obviously I remember DB very fondly, and he was the first pastor I heard when I first came to this church and bowled me over and that is why I returned. What kind of moral authority . . . I don't know. He was a great preacher and I felt a great truth and revelation in the things that he said. Jill Simpson told me that the pastor is not the church. At the time DB was leaving and I thought I was going to have to leave. The church being the body and not being the eye of Christ, or the head, but the whole body So the pastor is not necessarily the moral authority but the leader.

BV: If you sprain your ankle, you put a brace on. If you have a headache, you take an aspirin. You take care of yourself up to a certain point. As a certain point, you need to go to your doctor or you need to go to your minister to help take care of the problem. That is how I look at the minister; you hope he has the core values to help you.

CM: Or go on line to make sure that you have gotten all the information you can so that you know you can trust your doctor's opinion. Or is there something else you find to help you out there.

ME: I would like to take that whole doctor thing and take it to this, 'cause I was just in this situation. You wouldn't, uh, uh, I would consider the pastor as a general practice physician and there are specialists he can send you to and to have that humility to be able to say you know what maybe I am not the best person for this. Maybe I may not have all the answers for this, but let me send you to some specialist.

SK: The statement that core values come from the church . . . I agree with that. I think that what we have to be sure of as a church, with or without a pastor, our core values are coming from where core values come from. And when our core values are coming from where our core values are coming from as a church, whether we have a pastor in the pulpit or a leader in a committee, wherever, it comes back to what we said about meeting with the pastor about adultery, because the core values of the church are so we are going to say, "no."

CM: Brad already has core values. He already knows he shouldn't go out with that woman, regardless. Because of the pastor having leadership and authority in this case. He keeps him on the straight and narrow with his guidance.

SK: There are a lot of us in this room who have been through a lot of pastoral changes and the core values hopefully have been saved. But when you get Carol, she is just coming in, when you look at our views—whether they are views born into the church or views that come in from outside—my point is that not everyone who comes into the church knows what Evangel Heights core values are. Whether we agree with them or not, we need to be as a church so strong in our core values that there is no question where we stand on this issue or that issue, or where we go to seek guidance on this particular thing. A lot of times I think that is where we need

BB: We as people need to keep in the Bible. We need to keep reading it. The M.'s and V.'s did a great job of teaching our daughters and getting them spiritually centered. So when a pastor says to them that they are too spiritual for this youth group, they pushed my kids away instead of taking my kids and using them as mentors for the upcoming youth. They pushed my kids away. Now that is not what a pastor should be doing. They should have scooped my kids up and taken them to instruct them in how to mentor. That is where a pastor's role is very important for continuing to grow their people and making disciples of them. And not just keeping them in one spot forever.

ME: I would like to say that in this instance it maybe that your children were not supposed to be here at that time. The right and wrong of it is okay. We can have those reactions but I know that where they went, they were huge influencers.

CB: Pastors should not be putting up road-blocks and stumbling blocks for us.

LM: Okay, we've got to wrap up now.

Focus Group Session Three
"What's in the Store" January 22, 2006
Isaiah 58:1-10, Luke 4:18-19

Ref. # 4/7/12/21/25//2/3

Getting Started:

Ours is a hurting world in many ways. What are you personally most passionate about in meeting the needs of a hurting world? In other words, if you could do one thing that makes a lasting difference in this world, what would it be?

How is your answer above reflected in the way you spend time or resources either in the community or the church?

Digging Deeper:

The themes found in Isaiah 58 are similar to ones we find in Luke 4:18-19 and in Matthew 25 (the separation of the sheep and goats). Taking these passages together, list the various actions that are used to describe righteous or servant living:

Are there certain key words that seem to jump out at you? What are they and why?

Which of these activities would be most difficult for you?

Application:

Who are the least, last and lost of the Michiana area?

How do you respond to the activities of the “prophetic” church mentioned in today’s message?

What word does/can Evangel Heights proclaim to Michiana?

Transcript of Focus Group Three**“What’s in the Store?”****Isaiah 58:1-10****January 22, 2006**

JS: Ours is a hurting world in many ways. What are you personally most passionate about in meeting the needs of a hurting world? In other words, if you could do one thing that makes a lasting difference in this world, what would it be?

MD: Being a Stephen Minister.

JS: Okay.

JS: I think helping with world peace.

LM: If I could somehow show Christ’s true love in my action, that people would know Him through the way that I act or do.

CM: Ditto.

CB: Reaching the kids in a meaningful way. We are always just one generation away from perfection, theoretically. If we can get the kids to do their thing, then, you know, the adults die out and you got good kids.

BB: The kids that I deal with at Sidewalk Sunday School in the inner city...if we could help each child be able to read, then they could read their Bible. I have 12 year olds that I

want to send devotional sheets home with and they cannot read. And I can not give them everything that they need in twenty minutes in a lesson. I would like to be able to send something home that I know they could pick up later and read it. And that will impact them more than hearing it one time.

JS: Others? What are you most passionate about?

CM: Making one person feel like a human being.

TM: As I look at it, one thing that would be most beneficial for the world would be to have a strong family. I think that if you have a strong family it will filter out to the rest of the world.

JB: I'm going through a mid-life crisis in my life. I don't know what I want to do for the rest of my life.

MD: Stephen Minister. The reason I said that was because I personally know that I am not going to save this world but by being a Stephen Minister and touching that one person for as long as it takes. That is my passion.

JS: Anything else before we move on? Others? [pause] Alright, let us answer this one: How does your answer above (and all the things you have just said) how is that reflected in how you spend your time and your resources whether in the community or the church?

TC: That's really getting to the heart of it!

CC: Every opportunity that I see arise that deals with taking care of people or offering services I do. For example, the new neighbors who moved in and just had a baby. I cooked for a week and solicited others in the building to prepare meals...I did that. On my job I am always being open to God, you know, speaking to me, speaking through me to patients. I know I have already told you some of those things.

LM: I pray constantly about the way that my life should be and, I am not exactly sure like you Judy, I am not exactly sure where God is leading me, and I want to know. I don't want to miss it. I don't want to be a stumbling block, uh, so I feel like there are many times that I am constantly weighing what I am saying to people so that I am not a stumbling block. Should I have said something at work? Should I have said this? Can I bring up the name of Jesus in this instance? Or am I showing them by what I am doing or how I am acting, uh, that am I showing Christ's love in any way, shape, or form? So, I think it is kind of like a continuum every day all of the time, you know, and it is not that I, like . . . I am not explaining myself right. I can't explain it, but it is kind of like a constant state of prayer.

ME: In regards to what I said about trying to help people find their own personal vision of Christ, I guess what I try to do is, uh, listen and talk to people about their past experience. What is their passion? What do they find? What makes them tick? And try to

encourage them in a specific way that may fulfill their lives as well as help others know Christ more.

BB: Working up a curriculum. But the first thing you have to do is build a relationship. It has taken me five years to build trust relationships where you can find out which child can't read or they will open up to you. It just takes a long time. But first you have to love them and you have to love them into heaven. And you got to love them to the point that they say that you can go to the next step so you can help them. But it takes time.

JS: I remember her [referring to L. M.] one time sharing "that is what I do. I help people." L.'s motto, "I help people."

JS: The themes found in Isaiah 58 are similar to those found in Luke 4:18-19 and Matthew 25—the separation of the sheep and the goats. Taking these passages together, list the various actions that are used to describe righteous or servant living.

ME: What was the difference between the sheep and the goats? They may not have been what they thought; it was what they did.

JS: Treating your workers fairly, honestly.

JS: What are several key words that jump out at you?

JS: Ministry . . . yeah.

JB: I Just talked to the jail minister last week and he said that a lot of ministers, not anything against ministers, but ministers come in and they want to talk to the inmates but he requires them to put their phone number on the board. A lot of them say "forget it."

JS: The pastor does not want to put his phone number on the board?

JB: Especially when the inmate gets out of jail. He doesn't want anybody visiting. I am not judging anybody's level of commitment but I just thought that it was interesting.

BB: Think how vulnerable they put themselves when they do put their number

JB: I am not sure that I would want to know who is in the jail!

TM: I work with ex-offenders and they have my cell phone number. Trust me; they love to use my number!

JB: I always thought it would be hard to go to nursing homes, but I found it can be one of the most rewarding. My dog comes up and usually it is trying to find food somewhere on their clothes and he starts licking and then they are looking at the dog and are talking to the dog and then they are talking to you. It is just amazing.

JS: How cool!

JB: I always thought it would be the most horrible job—going to visit in the nursing home.

CC: Even inviting friends, even inviting strangers . . . we did that to the point where maybe it was like people won't want to do that. I remember driving in the rain and we say this young guy and he was soaking wet and normally, you know, I am not pulling over for anybody, but for some reason I just . . . I didn't have to tell him, he just automatically pulled over. And this young guy, he was probably 15 or 16 apparently he was hitchhiking to his uncle's house 'cause his man kicked him out. And we told him we were on the way to church and he was welcome to come to church with us. He came to church with us and at first he went . . . oh eh . . . but he was wet and cold. So he went to church with us and we took him back to the house. He got in the shower, he ate, he slept on the couch. I mean, he just hung out with us the whole day and then we all pitched in and bought him a ticket to his uncle's home. He gave T. his cowboy boots. You know, here was this little white guy giving his boots, you know, because T. admired his boots; he liked them. He gave T. his shoes and I can't remember his name, but it was just really weird and he was just so thankful. He was just an angel. I have not heard from him since then, but we did stuff like that.

CS: Even though it was kind of risky?

BB: But I think the biggest thing in all of this is fear. It's the thing that stops us. It is fear. It is what we imagine might happen, not what is actual reality.

TM: What the problem is with that is imagination is twisting the truth to a lot of people. I mean . . .

LM: It shouldn't let that stop you.

TM: Fear turns truth into false truth.

LM: It is God and you acknowledge that and you went ahead and did it despite your fears.

CM: That is what I try to remind Missy when she comes up with this stuff. You can't get caught up in your fear. The newspaper does not announce that five million people were not in a car accident today. They announce that one person died on the way to a wedding. So it is easy to get caught up in the fear, but we need to put it in perspective.

ME: In regards to Isaiah 58, in response to your getting the blessing from doing those services which, in the end part of Isaiah 58 it says, uh, if you do all of these things, uh, share your bread, shelter, the homeless . . . your life will shine at that point. Your healing will begin at that point. Your righteousness will go before you and God's glory will guard your back end. Then God will hear you and answer. I think it is interesting that he says

then God will hear you and answer you if you do these things. And if you give of these things, then your joy will begin. Then your joy will be fulfilled. So, I think often times we just find ourselves in depression states because we are just so self-observed. We don't give of ourselves.

TC: Matthew 25! [inaudible] But is it all over social issues? The priority of most denominations is with social issues without the depth.

LM: So are you window dressing or are you actually

JS: . . . filling up the store?

BB: Well, along with that, when people have needs, we need to see what the real needs are and not the ones that we perceive or think. We tend to give because we think that is what they need and it may not be the actual issue. That family might not need food. It may be that they need money for a doctor's appointment or it may be that they need clothes or it may be that they need school books. You know, it is not always what we think they need. You know, the first thing we think of with the poor is that they need food. So we give, give, give, give, but that may not be the actual need for that family.

LM: So that requires communication. You can't throw money at it, you actually have to talk and find out what they need from me. What can I do for you?

BB: 'Cause you can say, we do all things social action things, and that's great. But are we actually meeting the real need?

TC: What about that issue? It was kind of out of place. We had this guy in seminary that was quick to fight with the pastor, but this one day he wanted money but we said we have food and he said he was hungry. But he wanted money!

ME: That might be just what he needs. The pastor might have been filled with the Spirit to know what to do.

JS: It doesn't always turn out like you hope or think it will. I remember S. B. helping a guy with gas money and food and he bought him milk and it wasn't what the guy wanted and he poured the quart of milk all over S.'s brand new sports car. You know, doing the right thing doesn't always turn out.

JS: We were talking about the key words jumping up at us and you have all given really good examples of how this works. These key words and what you do. Now, what is most difficult for you? Which of these activities? Judy said nursing home and some said prison and that kind of thing.

BB: Sometimes it is difficult when I go visiting on Thursdays to see my kids [Sidewalk Sunday School], because there are a few houses, I mean most of the houses—now I can walk the neighborhood without problems—but certain houses, when I am walking up to

them, I am saying “I don’t want to go here.” I could skip this one today, you know, but I have to make myself go ahead and do it.

PP: Why those houses?

BB: You know, they are run down, they are dark. There is something about that house that gives me the willies to walk up to it.

PD: Does it look safe?

CB: No. [Husband answering for wife]

TM: You know, when you are out there enough, you just get a feeling. To walk up to something—you just get a feeling.

BB: Well, the thing is

CB: There is a certain

TM: You just can’t describe it.

BB: It is a Spirit thing I believe, you know, so it is telling me maybe—be cautious. I don’t go by myself. I always have somebody with me.

JB: I think it is hard to see the bad choices people have made and you just want to tell them you have made a bad choice there but you just have to listen to...they are trying to find their way and to you they have made the worst possible choice they could possibly make. And if it were you, you would have gone in completely the opposite direction. You just want to tell them exactly what they should do and it just, you know, I guess, sometimes there is what’s what and you personally cannot change it—only God can.

CM: That is a great point. I think that is what makes it most difficult. We all have our own baggage but also our own life experience and knowledge. We just feel like sometimes if somebody would listen to you, you would help them straighten out their lives. Nobody wants to hear that.

CD: Yeah.

CM: From any of us. And being able to shut up which is really hard—really, really hard. Because you know you have the answer. But being quiet and listening and believing, having faith that God is going to work in that person’s life The two passages Isaiah and Matthew are distinctly different in that Isaiah specifically says at the beginning “Declare to my people their transgressions,” and one of the things I have always thought about, and this is not to be a rhetorical question, it is the real question: where are we just supposed to be that bar tender who listens, making the bar more popular than church, versus the person who listens and then says, “OK, this is what I want you to do.” Mother

Teresa never proselytized. She was known for not proselytizing or trying to convert or save people. Thinking about John Maxwell, yesterday, saying or telling people you need to save people in contrast not only in style but in the way they live their faith [A video of John Maxwell was viewed by church leaders the prior day about the importance of leading people to Christ.] And as you were reading about this this morning and thinking about it now, where is that we just listen or just do. At what point does your obligation change in some way?

JS: Where is that point?

SK: Well does that go back to what the pastor said today about there is no congregation that is going to be able to do everything. Every congregation has their place to where God is calling them to be. And maybe John Maxwell's calling is in the salvation end of it and Mother Teresa was to be that person who didn't so much evangelizing.

CB: We each have our calling.

SK: Yeah. Who did more? Maybe that was her thing. Not everybody is going to be able to do everything.

CM: Well, she cared for the dying though, just as, remember the example he [John Maxwell] gave visiting that man in the hospital who died and he never "led him to Jesus" - a phrase that I will always find difficult.

SK: And different people are going to reach different groups of people through different means I think.

TC: The body is collective. Luke proclaims the gospel. Mother Teresa is the hand. Remember from the human perspective. From God's perspective there is just one church and not Methodist, Baptist, etc. All the churches put together doing exactly what one person is to do.

CM: What a great answer!

JS: Everyone has a job to do!

TC: Yeah! There was a church that could not find out why they existed. It was an elderly church and they were dying and the ministry was going into a slide, but once you tap into your purpose everything turns around.

LM: In regard to your question about the bartender. One time it may be in your approach and move on, you know. And sometimes those people, you know, if you would hang around a little longer and say would you like to talk about this a little bit more. At times the answer may be no, because they are not ready for it. And other times, it may be the turning point.

TM: I agree with L. There is not an answer to your question C.

US: I think the answer is in the situation. What the situation brings is what the Spirit leads.

TM: That answer does not cover it all.

US: Each person in this room has their own mission and what they need to do.

BB: Some are planters and some are waterers.

LM: That may be one of my most difficult . . . because when you see it, uh, a problem, or hear something or somebody needs something, uh, I know that to be effective most of the time there has to be a relationship as you said. I need to take the time to listen to that person. I need to engage in longer than just this. I need to hear what that person says and respond. And that is one of my most difficult things because there are so many other things going on that I have to hurry up and get done and I fail at those because, because of that I won't engage because I know I can't follow that through so I won't engage.

CM: That is why the bartender is so popular.

LM: Exactly!

CM: Because he is held hostage behind that bar until the bar closes. He *has* to listen to whoever is sitting there.

PD: I think sometimes that just letting people know that we are Christians, uh, allows them to start talking to us and we can help them. Just by letting them know that we are Christians.

JS: Let us look at the application of this. Uh, who are the least, the last, and the lost of the Michiana area? Who are they?

ME: I want to say every one of us.

BB: We have the disabled that still need to be touched by Christ. There are the children. We got the inner city. We have a lot of poor people in this city.

JB: People in jail.

TM: Sometimes it is really easy for us to look all the folks that we just heard about, but you know what, there are a group of people who go to church every day that are still lost. They all go to church and play the game but they are lost. They don't believe this. You know, we are so focused on the unfortunate that sometimes we forget what is in our own midst. Those are the ones who are sitting the pews but don't really know what the words mean.

SK: Like when the pastor did the children's sermon today on the rock. They look good on the outside but how are they hurting on the inside. We can be sitting next to the person on Sunday morning in the pew.

CB: I'll get it right one of these days!

JS: Okay. How do you respond to the activities of the prophetic church mentioned in today's message?

ME: We are all deeply in these kinds of activities that, uh, we can tap into and start acting like this prophetic church. Utilizing our resources, our history, our passion, and our resources to look and see what God has placed in our midst.

PP: Think about the church I described. How do you respond to that church?

JS: The one with the billboard: "Nuclear Free Zone"?

TM: I think that is a church that really has it together!

BB: A united church.

US: A church who knows what their core values are.

LM: Well, like M was saying, he said last week, the social aspect of, I mean, you said more than that, but you do have to say that church sounded like they were addressing the needs of possibly their community in that regard. And that is what we need to do. What are the needs of our community? What do we need to stand for? Why do we exist on Ironwood and Colfax? What is it?

US: What was that church saying? You can come here and we are not going to bomb you?

TC: No. No nuclear weapons.

CM: I didn't know what to think about it. I didn't understand it.

JS: What did somebody else think about it?

US: It was kind of a gimmick to say come here.

BV: It is a political statement. That is how I see it.

CM: I immediately started thinking what denomination it wouldn't be. Maybe it meant this is a peaceful place. But I thought it had a strong political tone.

US: Did it mean they were against war?

SK: Maybe it was to get people talking and thinking just as we are doing today.

BV: I thought it was a statement of peace—anti-war.

MD: What I heard them saying was just not that statement but that this church kind of lived on the edge for all kinds of different reasons. I would think that the people who went to this church were probably extremely excited with the work they were doing and as individuals what they were doing by being members of this church. But I also feel that there would be around, maybe not the next block, but I feel that the church might have been hated.

US: Oh, yeah.

CB: When he said “nuclear free” I sort of substituted “controversy free.” The topic of illegal immigration and offer a sanctuary for those people to come and at least not search for their green card So, you know, it was a very controversial, bold move on their part, legal or illegal, to make their stand.

JS: Well, they said all people are important. No one is excluded here.

US: I was thinking about some comparison in town we could think about, and I don’t know if we have a lot of refugees, but if we put a sign out, “Gang free.” I am thinking gangs might come.

CB: In the paper today or yesterday they were fighting to win but they were having a fellowship time in the neighborhood—trying to promote the gang free environment.

SB: The paper said the kids could not wear braids, could not wear their pants down, and they could not wear colors.

JS: So what word does Evangel Heights proclaim to Michiana?

BV: We need to show that here there is hope.

CM: That is terrific! Hope Rescue Mission. The thought of a bunch of old men who are absolutely beyond hope. They are never going to change; they are going to their grave in exactly the same drunk or drug addict as they were when they walked through the doors. And you know that. And there is something about that that breaks your heart. To have some sort of spirit leading in your life you know that actually there is a small shred of hope for that person. There is a refusal to give into hopelessness. There is just something for me that is so extraordinarily marvelous and wonderful to know that that guy is going to come in for twenty years for a free meal, who has been living on the edge and dying. Something should kick in and say no, no there is still time. There is still time!

BV: That is why that person is still walking, able to talk, able to think.

JS: What word for Evangel Heights?

TC: Do we have one?

TM: I like C's, hope.

US: I like that, too.

TM: Is that what we actually do?

BB: The question is does and can. So, do we and can we?

CC: J., uh, I might not do radical things for God, but I have a radical mind, I mean, I think big when it comes to God. I might not do it but I look for him to do miraculous things. So when I think of a word for this area. Some of it is like putting up a billboard outside saying "Miracle." God is in a miracle working business still. To piggy back off C., I work in a psychiatric hospital in Kalamazoo and these people are mentally ill. But anyway, these people are going through all kinds of mental issues and things like that, it should be hope for them. When I go in there, I am not afraid at all. Why? Because I am walking in there with a mind set that is with me or He is in me and He is going to be speaking to these people to heal and he is walking through these halls. I wish that we as a body, we could let Christ do everything. What if God took on our lives for 24 hours, just for 24 hours . . . ? Jesus is doing, He's going to work, He's taking care of the kids and He is doing everything. What would our lives be like? I mean how would we change?

CM: You know what it would be like. This is exactly what it would be like and this is why hope is so important. It would be just like the Emmaus story. When you have two guys walking down the road and they are joined by a stranger. The whole way along they don't know who he is. They get to their house, he is going to take off, they say no. No, they give him the bread for whatever reason they gave it to him and he took the bread, it says in scripture, and blessed it and broke it and in the breaking of the bread they knew who he was. Every night at Hope Rescue Mission, I am telling you, there is something that can happen when people break bread and sit around the table together.

CC: Because like I said, there are people coming in with these disorders for many, many years. There are some of these physicians that say he has been like this forever. He is not going to change. But when Jesus walks in and sits down with those who are just totally psychotic, but it is like He is the only one who can break through. What if Christ was there just actually be right there? What would change? Then they would come out among us. To me these are the least, the lost and the last, because we would cross to the other side of the street if we would see them. If you are physically well, if you are mentally well, because it all plays a part. It is just amazing to me. Do they even have any hope.

LM: Welcome! Love! Open Arms! Faith!

Focus Group Session Four
“Giving Away the Store” January 29, 2006
2 Corinthians 9:6-10

Ref. #6/9/23/27//3

Getting Started:

How do you feel when you give something away? Receive a gift?

Digging Deeper:

Describe the context of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 9:6-10? (Look at 2 Corinthians 8)

If you were a part of the Corinthian Church and had just heard Paul’s letter read to you, what would be your response?

If you were to state Paul’s teaching as a core value, what might it sound like?

Application:

What is Evangel Heights known for within the larger Michiana community?

How would you rate Evangel Heights in the value area(s) suggested in your responses to the last question?

How do you believe you or Evangel Heights would have responded to the illustration about the church giving to missions before embarking upon a building campaign?

Transcript of Focus Group Four
“Giving Away the Store”
Isaiah 58:1-10, Luke 4:18-19
January 29, 2006

JS: Are we ready to get started? How do you feel when you give something away?

TM: It isn’t like I think about it. I think it is just part of basic life. L. and I think that it is just how we are. I don’t think we think about it whether it is good, bad or indifferent. It is just like if someone needs something and we can give it, it is just something we are going to do and there is no thought process behind it as how this is going to come about. It is what we do.

BB: I think it needs to be thought out knowing that it is something that is going to make somebody else’s day better for whatever occasion.

DL: When you give of yourself, your time or your talents or your money or whatever it is, you feel like you are contributing to a worthy cause or worthy outcome. Whether it be helping at Hope Rescue Mission or whatever.

CB: It depends on your personal attachment to whatever it is you are giving away. If it is something that really doesn't mean anything to you there is not a lot of joy in it. If it means a great deal to you, and it can really make an impact on somebody.

MB: I still think it needs to be given graciously. If you are giving because you are expected to give, you are not giving graciously and you are not giving for a good reason.

SK: Well, I know that when I give with the right frame of mind, I feel blessed in the giving. You know, if I am giving in the situation where I feel that I am giving because I have to give or I am giving something away that doesn't really have, isn't meaningful to me, I give grudgingly. So, when you really give, it is like with the right spirit and the right heart. You receive back not even expecting, I mean, just, not even anything the person you are giving to does. You just feel so good and you just know that that is what you are supposed to do, that you just receive back more than what you ever felt possible.

JS: Okay, what about when you receive a gift?

ME: I hate receiving gifts.

JS: You do? Why?

ME: I just never, I just never feel good about it. Nothing. I appreciate uh, the mentality from the person, but I always feel uncomfortable receiving anything from anybody.

JS: You know why?

ME: Probably because I feel that I don't deserve it. Uh, that might be one part. Another might be because I don't want to feel indebted. I don't want to feel that way. And they may not have any thought that I will be there for them, but it seems like that.

MF: So that would be your gift to them, that you would receive it?

ME: It could be.

TM: I think it is harder to receive than to give. I really do.

LM: I think it is harder to receive. And I at times feel the same way. But it also opens up opportunities for a month down the road, a year down the road, ten years down the road that you continue to be blessed by that if it is truly something we need. Certainly if it is junk and someone gives it to us, so be it. But if it is truly a meaningful gift, I mean, I can still look in my closet ten years later and see something that was given to me and I know thought went into that. And that blessing, that gift, goes on to bless a long time.

TM: When sometimes people give you a gift it is a very hard. The idea is they are giving because they are being led to and if you don't take it graciously it means you are kind of affecting them because it is what they are giving by the Holy Spirit. And if you don't accept it, it kind of goes against their giving. And I try to think of that whenever someone ever gives me a gift. Uh, I try to think of it that way then.

CB: You do not want to deny the blessing.

TM: Yeah. This is what God is leading them to do so that is their blessing. And if you deny it or not accept it in a certain way, then you are kind of denying their blessing.

MB: There are several things I would like to mention here. One is, uh, there are certain stages in your life where, where gifts are things, something you absolutely need. Uh, I am thinking particularly my parents or when I was in college they didn't have to but they did. But in return then, I didn't spend it on beer, women, or whatever, you know. I spent it on good things. There's a certain stage where we are now, where I call paying it forward, which is you take the gift that you gave, okay, I'm this conduit with this. I'll pass it along to someone who actually needs it. I think that is the third thing . . . the second thing. And the third thing is the most meaningful gift I ever got had not to do with money. My mom wrote a forty page thing on what she was like when she was growing up; and we actually [inaudible] before that. It's a long story but we, my dad, sold his farm and we, I, had my whole family put together this story of the farm that would be for Christmas. There was not a dry eye in the place. And those are the types of gifts that just, those are the types of things that you really, really appreciate. So it depends on the gift.

TM: I agree with M. I think sometimes the letter and the notes and maybe something from the family is a gift that is a different kind of gift. But sometimes I think that we say if it doesn't come in wrapping and all that we cannot see that as a gift. That gift that you just talked about probably is the best gift around.

JS: Okay. Should we dig a little deeper and describe the context of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 and I have that so I will read it again. [Reads scripture]

PP: Could you describe that context and what you also recall from Chapter 8. What sets this whole passage up? Do you remember?

CB: The Corinthians church was reluctant to make good on their pledge. A lot of times people just give lip service and say, yeah, I am going to do this and then as time wears on, you kind of forget and let it slide. Thinking that, your encouragement will bring somebody else to the front.

BB: Well the word "willingly" kept coming up even during the sermon. About willingly giving, uh, willingly doing it, joyfully. And that is what struck me, was that, uh, verse 12 in Chapter 8 said, "For if the willingness is there the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have." So, for if the willingness is there the

gift is acceptable. So the gift is not acceptable if you are not willing, and if it was not willingly given. If it was forced then in God's eyes it is not an acceptable thing.

TC: That is a hard theology.

BB: Well, I think what it is saying is that God is not going to bless that gift.

TC: I am not disagreeing. This is something to stop and think about because it is motivating the spirit behind giving as the intent of the message. Or is it in giving itself? I think it seems to be that it is *the intent* of the giving is the priority rather than the giving.

JS: His priority meaning God's?

TC: Paul's reason for writing. And his whole sermon. He is promoting the principle of giving by promoting the principle of the attitude for giving.

BB: It could very well be the attitude, because in the very next verse he talks about Jesus giving everything willingly, without any hesitation. So I think you are probably right, it is more about attitude.

JS: What else was going on there in Chapter 8? The Corinthians were holding back a little bit. You're talking about that. But what else was happening?

ME: What I am seeing is that they were giving Titus to the Corinthians and that is the gift that they were giving, a person, and in context that is what I am seeing as far as about giving. Apparently he was probably a great sacrifice for them to give up Titus to the Corinthians.

MB: But from the sermon, they were talking about the Macedonians—church at Macedonia where they did not have a lot of money and they were giving harder, whatever. Corinth was going “wait a minute, let's look at this before we do something.” So they think it is a contest, I think that is where this . . . when he starts off with the point is this or this is the point. What is the message that you hear when someone stops and at the beginning of the chapter it says, “this is the point.” You had better read the next two or three sentences very carefully. That is what I think was going on: he was contrasting a willing heart versus a not so willing heart.

JS: And what were the differences of the two churches?

WB: Well it sounds like Macedonia was really poor and Corinth was pretty wealthy. Is that true? And this is interesting it says in 2 Corinthians 8:2, “for during a severe ordeal of affliction (this is talking about the Macedonians), their abundant joy and extreme poverty.” So they are really happy for people. Huge contrast!

TC: I would like to look at verse 4. It says, “begging us so earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.” They were begging them to be pleased and they gave more.

TM: I think they both started out for what it sounded like, they both started out wanting to give but as the time went on they started thinking about it. You know, we don’t want to give as much so their brain took over from their heart in the giving, whereas the Macedonians just kept with the Spirit. The ones with the more money, it was like they were really being faithful in their giving, they felt good at first and it sounds like they were really good guys at first, but when it comes down to actually releasing any funds, they may not be that nice about it now.

WB: You kept saying in the sermon, uh, “the economy of God is so alien to what I am thinking.” And I am thinking a rich church—well you think that looks real nice, people will want to come. Well I am thinking, a real poor church is that more attractive? I mean sometimes you are really attracted to the downtrodden because you feel like you want to go there. I don’t know, you want to help them out more. They’re more loving and compassionate. I don’t know. There is just something about the poor, especially the joy of poor people is just phenomenal, I mean.

BB: You know what it is? Because they know where their true joy . . . who their true supplier is. They know it is much easier for a poor person to understand why they need Jesus than for somebody who has everything they need. They don’t have a want so they don’t have that spiritual, I mean, they don’t get down to the spiritual part because all this material stuff is taken care of. They don’t realize, I mean, have seen that between the children of one church I was at, and they had everything that they needed, and the sidewalk kids I work with that have nothing; they accept Christ much easier than the kids who have everything because they don’t know what it means to want something. But when you get the material stuff out of the way, they can see that spiritual need much clearer.

TM: I think that people who have a lot still have a void sometimes. I mean there is always a void and just by having money isn’t going to fill the void. I think that a lot of them know that and there is something they need. I don’t know if some of them know what it is, uh, and just because they have money doesn’t keep them from not filling that void and accepting Jesus. Because I think if it is presented in the right way and not as if you give me this, you get in return all that, but here is something to fill that void that you know is there. And I say that because before I accepted Christ, my life was very different than it is now. My whole life was about if I could beat up as many peoples as I can and you know, be the tough guy. That is how I survived this life. But when you get to a certain age, you just can’t go out there and do that, but you have to fill that void with something. That void is where you have Jesus. Just having money doesn’t make or not having money doesn’t make you to accept Jesus. I think it helps presenting it to certain people, you know, where that void is in your life. This is what it is.

BV: If we are going to give testimonies, uh, about where we were in life, how bad it was and like we give testimonies, how they found Christ and were saved. A lot of us sit back there, and think my life is or was not like that. What am I going to say if I give my testimony to people? It would be pretty boring and bland. I always wondered about that, that maybe it is harder for people who were raised like I was, middle class, you know. I never got into trouble, so I was reading a part from C.S. Lewis and I just read it this week and he just hit on it and I can't repeat it as he said it there. But he said basically that it is harder for people who are raised in the church, have good character, they really don't lack anything so they are a pretty good person so surely God will take me. But those are the persons who may miss the whole thing. They come from a good family, don't get into any trouble, go to work, we "act" like we're supposed to, it is hard for those people to see and recognize the need for Christ as opposed to those who hit rock bottom. People who are poor, uh, people who have nothing, are different, somewhat. So I think all I am saying is maybe it is harder for people who come from quote, middle class background, you know, quote, pretty good people, unquote.

TM: They associate being a good person as being accepted by Christ.

BV: Having good character. You are a good person. A person in society may give things away to people, may be very giving. But you don't have Christ in your heart. You may think God will surely take me.

CB: The story of the prodigal son, the brother . . . the difference there

BV: Yeah, the one who stayed at home and did everything right, but his heart wasn't there.

CB: He didn't get it.

BV: Right, exactly.

SS: So you are talking about giving and receiving gifts here which is very related to what we are talking about the gift of Christ.

ME: I'm reading through this and what I am seeing is a Louisiana experience. We see that the Macedonians have been in a very severe test of affliction. And Paul and Titus, they are sending Titus and some Macedonians to this church to receive a very large sum of money from this other church apparently. So he, in order to take care of their brothers in Macedonia So again, in regard to context, he sends some people ahead in order to make sure that their giving is done in a cheerful and loving way. A specific reason, uh, just taking care of their brothers. Uh, those in Christ, and uh, just, you know, I didn't listen correctly, I didn't hear it right. It's the church taking care of the church. Corinth was very prosperous and Macedonia had just been through a very tragic event apparently.

JS: So if you were a part of that Corinthian Church and you just heard Paul's letter just read to you, what would be your response?

ME: Get out the check book!

TC: I think the response that he wanted was more, I don't know. I think it is a spiritual heart check, because I think maybe we say that when everything is alive spiritually, then checkbook giving comes naturally. Corinth is in a terrible spiritual condition. I think that is the conflict here. It's Corinth's terrible spiritual condition. In actuality they keep thinking that they are a whole lot better in all those ministerial aspects.

TM: So is Paul telling them to give money or change the church?

TC: Paul is trying to take the church to a higher level.

JS: So if you were part of that church what would your response be?

BB: Well, as human beings, we would probably be offended at first. Saying, "How dare he say that about us! Look at what we did!" But then in verse 9, I think it is interesting what he is doing in sending people ahead so that, "hey, make sure that you are everything I said you were. Don't make a fool of yourself when everybody gets there." You know, but at first I think they were offended because as I think as human beings, that is what we do. Because we think we are okay just the way we are.

CB: He is trying to focus them back in the lane that they are to be in. If the thought processes get corrected, the giving will come naturally.

SK: I am hearing a lot of talk about money things, the monetary part of it which is all important because there are a lot of programs, things that have to be done that can only be obtained financially. But if staying with that lane is what the pastor was talking about, you know, you need to view where you are, sometimes it is in our gifts, our time, our service. You know sometimes writing a check for some people can almost be a cop out. And it might be what God is asking them to do is write a check. Although to write the check and put it in the offering plate and say let someone else do with the check when it might be God saying to you, "I want you to be the one." But maybe they needed people there that could go there to build what they needed or to, uh, help in the schools or people who couldn't necessarily give financially, but could take finances that other people in the Corinthian Church provided. But then their gift was to use those finances with their service and time. And sometimes I think we get caught up in, uh, you know, I can't give much money so God can't use me, and I can't be profitable. When really you might have a gift for service that is really what is needed more than the financial part of it.

TM: I agree S. I think we all get tied up when we all hear money. And we miss a lot.

JS: I don't know how it got to be six minutes before the hour, so we need to move on. Okay, what core values do you see expressed in Paul's teaching?

ME: Whatever your gifts, just be a cheerful giver!

TM: I think you have to teach. I think not only sharing but you have to teach. 'Cause there are a lot of folks out there who need to be taught who Christ is and about. You cannot be a cheerful giver unless you understand what you are giving to. And like a lot of times you come into a program and it is just like, you don't understand what you are giving to. And of course, you say, "I will write a check." The whole teaching process is critical in all this. I mean he was writing this letter ahead of time, he said, "Please have your money ready so that when we come it is not a distraction, it's already done." We get there and it is all done and we don't have to pull it out of you. And you understand and everybody is educated but you can't do it without education.

JS: Okay, education. What were you going to say?

MB: He was, in the sermon, talking about if you ever won the lottery. And whenever, I teach, every class I teach over at Bethel I bring up the fact folks, we have already won the lottery. And the point to this passage is and the point to the sermon was, I thought, God is going to make the thing go around. It goes around and around and you have already won the lottery, you are healthy, or wherever you live, you have won the lottery. We're alive, we live in America, we're, gosh, we're given a talent. And God wants to use those talents and God will give you more if you give out more. I know that for a fact. It has happened to me.

JS: In one or two words, core values from all that:

MB: Understanding. You have to understand that God is right there with you.

?: Faithfulness.

JS: Faithfulness I heard. I am not supposed to guide your discussion, but in my own mind I heard gratefulness in that. Anything else?

JS: Okay. Let's try to get to the application before we have to leave. What is Evangel Heights known for within the larger Michiana community?

?: Stephen's Ministry.

JS: Hope Rescue Mission, Bashor Home.

JS: What do you mean?

JS: Serving dinners.

SK: Parents Day Out, Weekday School programs are a lot of ways that families come into the church. That's outreach.

JS: I can think of one, peanut brittle.

US: Lamb Ministry.

JS: Yeah, lamb ministry.

WB: You know, I have always heard when I have asked what's our image, "We are a friendly church." Which I know is true. But just recently since the class has started, I really feel the gift this church has is "intelligence." We have some real servant people, and it just amazes me. I mean, we could, we really have some servant and gifted people, teachers, and educators. I don't really think we realize our gift.

?: That was really evident a week ago yesterday—the outstanding leaders.

JS: You mean the leadership summit? Good example.

WB: We really do have good educational programming. I don't think we even realize. I know that I, until recently, you know, it has been a given, I am much more grateful and am much more aware of what a gift it is.

JS: If anyone has to leave to go to second service, feel free. We'll stay a couple of extra minutes to try and finish this.

JS: How would you rate Evangel Heights in value areas suggested in your responses to the last question?

MB: I don't get value area.

JS: The value areas that you just talked about.

US: Good.

?: Those that were mentioned were excellent. They are high quality programs.

MB: One area we just totally moved past was adult education. Adult Sunday School. We are known for that and we are darned good at it. And that is where a lot of people get tied into the church is through that. So, we are pretty good at the stuff. We are lacking in a few areas. [Pastor's note: I wish I was still in the room here to ask what those areas might be.]

JS: How do you believe you or Evangel Heights would have responded to the illustration about the church giving to missions before embarking upon a building campaign?

BB: I think a majority of the people would respond just as the pastor in the story did, "NO!" and struggle with God over it.

DL: Well, what are we supposed to do? Is it true? Is it what they want us to do? Let's stop and think for a minute. They probably would realize, well it is this way.

BB: Well, in the other illustration of priming the pump, that kept coming back to me with the saying that when he was first telling it, the pastor saying "no" we can't do that, and I am thinking, "prime the pump, prime the pump." That, you know, we can't be that blessing down the road because we can't see and be willing to prime the pump first.

CB: There was that campaign they had here for several years. Missions, prime the pump.

JS: How do you think our church would react to that story M.?

MB: I think we would have done it.

JS: Similar to what the church in the illustration did?

MB: But honestly, it depends upon whether you have someone who is going to push the issue. And that is what happened in that case. God was telling the minister to push the issue. If someone just comes to us and says, like the visiting guy comes and says we would like to have \$120,000 and then disappears, we are not going to do it because we have other pressing needs. But if he leaves and there are two or three people, "we really need the \$120,000, we need to raise \$120,000" and three to four people get on it and start pushing it. This church will do anything.

CB: If our hearts are open and our minds and our eyes are open, God will present it in such a way that we'll understand.

MB: But God doesn't act through mystical intervention. God acts through people. And so, he would have to lay it on the hearts of three or four people who really want to get it accomplished in order for the church to follow. He laid it on the heart of the minister and everyone got behind him. And that is a basic fact about leadership: if you have someone who is passionate about something, people follow.

JS: Thank you all.

Focus Group Session Five
"Jesus' Resurrection Words" February 5, 2006
Matthew 28:16-20

Ref. # 2/16/30//2/10

Getting Started:

If someone should come up to you and ask about your relationship with Jesus, what would you tell them?

If this same person asked you *how they* could have a relationship with Jesus, what would you tell them? And how would you feel (have you felt) in sharing these things with your friend?

Digging Deeper

We briefly looked at Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:45-49, John 20:21-23 and John 21:15-19 in today's message. List the things Jesus asks of his disciples in the resurrection appearances. (Some may not have been mentioned in the morning message)

What do you believe Jesus asks of his disciples today?

Application:

Complete this sentence: The purpose of the church . . .

How does this compare and relate to what we personally value? With what you believe Evangel Heights values? What are the things that take us out of our comfort zone?

Transcript of Focus Group 5 "Jesus' Resurrection Words" Matthew 28:16-20 February 5, 2006

JS: If someone should come up to you and ask you about your relationship with Jesus, what would you tell them?

JS: It is well with my soul.

BB: I would first say that He is the Savior of my life and then I would start telling him about what things He had been doing in my life.

CB: Well that just tells about the relationship.

BB: Well that is what the question is.

CB: My first thought was, strained. You know, it is how I struggle to keep that relationship with Him because of our own wants and desires.

JS: What does that mean?

CB: I was being honest. Yeah.

MB: Jesus is a business partner.

JS: What does that mean M.?

MB: I don't know if that is a church answer, but the big business of getting through life. He works through me and I work through Him as much as I can. I mean in every business partner or relationship, you are going to have an argument. You are not always on the same page, so that is how I view it. It works for me. It probably doesn't work for a lot of people, but it works for me that way. It's a partnership.

JS: What would you tell if someone asks you about your relationship with Jesus? What would you say about that?

ME: I guess that I would say disciple, friend, and I would be called a puppet.

JS: You would be called a puppet? Why? What do you mean by that?

ME: Disciple only goes so far.

CC: People ask me in my work situation and I have been asked quite a bit lately. I think sustainer. He is the Sustainer and uh, but I try not to use those really technical terms because those people don't need those really technical terms. They need to know, because they don't understand the technical, that every day when I get up and I am making decisions and there are people that I care for that I can go to God and pray for them and pray about this and that. And that is what they want to know. They want to know if He cares. They don't want to know the theology of it. What they grab onto is that He really does love and value us.

JS: You said those technical terms?

CC: If you say "He is my Savior and Lord of my life." If I say that, it kind of sounds haughty and kind of holier than thou kind of thing. And I think that the people I relate to want to know that it is real and something that they can do now. Not something that they might learn to do. That they have to be at a certain place before they can enjoy God's grace. And, uh, so that communication for me has to be very personal. The people who are asking me are not in front of all the people. It is usually one on one. The other operators are someplace else in the hospital and they ask me directly. Like, "Where do you go to church?" and, "What do the people believe?" and, "How do you guys worship?" And so the other thing at work, going back further, I sit down at another station and when another intern calls me, we will talk about that. And, uh, they also have relationships and I ask them about that. "How did God work through your life?" Not always just preaching and preaching, but taking from them. Drawing from them. Giving them an opportunity to tell how God works in their lives every day. What a blessing!

ME: I also meant to throw in a teacher—just to use His words and His deeds and how I should live my life. He is my Teacher, Priest, and Rabbi.

CM: I would use Comforter. In fact, I just had to write that on an application recently where that question was asked. “Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ.” And I wrote that he is the great Comforter and that His humanness and His deity are something that continue to be a struggle to understand, but that really helps to answer a lot of questions. There is nothing that I have experienced or can experience that He also has not experienced. That to me is something that is extraordinarily comforting.

JS: Okay. If that same person asked you how they could have a relationship with Jesus, what would you tell them and how would you feel, or have you felt, in sharing these things with your friend?

MB: I think people get scared away by that “saving moment.” Everybody is supposed to be saved in an instant, in a moment of eurobic [sic] revelation. And it scares people. I never had that eurobic [euphoric] moment. I’m sorry, I never had it. And, if some people have, I think it is great, but if somebody was going to ask me that, I would say, “If you want to be friends with somebody, you got to at least talk to him.” And one place to talk to him and meet him is when you go to church. If you are uncomfortable for a couple three months, you just start doing it. Most people, if you are going to meet somebody, and you are to be friends with them, you are going to be uncomfortable with them anyway. And if you can, you have to be in the presence of the person to have a relationship with them. And you are going to be uncomfortable with them the first few months. So what? Hang on anyway. It is a good place to be.

CM: That’s a really great answer and I would say almost the same thing, but use a little bit different words. Recently, I went to the web site of a Christian college, a Baptist college, and you can look at their faculty on line. Every single person gave their saved date. I couldn’t believe it. Now that is terrifying to me because there is obviously some expectation that they would have of new people, not that I have. But the point is that anybody they would hire at that institution you need to give your saved date. I think that is very intimidating and uncomfortable. But I would tell people it is up to you, if you want the relationship you have to go after it. So, get busy. Go to church and get into some kind of a Bible study because as you study it, truths are revealed. That is the foundation for the beginning of a relationship. Disciple I is just great for doing that, I think.

ME: I would just show them a little bit because obviously they are looking to find information about Jesus and God. So it’s problematic because the Holy Spirit has already burdened them. So you could possibly show some specific directives in the Bible that would show who Christ is and maybe the Holy Spirit would allow them to see a little bit more of Christ and create a relationship just on the words that are already written.

BB: Well, the thing that you are saying is starting a foundation is very good. There has to be some moment where you decided in your heart that you really, honestly believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of your life. That is a very defining moment. I mean

there has to be some point in your life where all of a sudden you decided, yeah, He is my savior. And it is important for people to know that eventually you need to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. I mean, it says right in Scripture. It doesn't mean that they are going to do that right at that moment, but they want to know, "How am I to be saved?" That's what some of the men in the Bible said to Peter, you know. Was it Peter, when he came out of the jail? No, Paul and Silas, when the jail fell apart, you know, and the earthquake happened and they said, "How are we to be saved?" What did Paul do? He taught them, he showed them and they were saved because they believed in their heart and confessed with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. So, somewhere in that, that has to happen.

CM: I wouldn't disagree with that except for the "defining moment." If you take a poll, how many people have a specifically remembered "defining moment?" [several people raise their hands in response] I guess that's, well, it's obvious.

BB: But even if, let's say, when the kids stand up and do their confirmation, if they really do believe what they are saying when the pastor is asking them their questions, that is a "defining moment" for them. They have just confessed with their mouth and they do believe in their heart. I mean, we don't know that, only God knows what they believe in their heart. But if at that moment they really believe it and have spoken it out loud, that is their "defining moment." It is not always the big euphoric thing. Some people do have those moments. It depends on the person, but I think that somewhere in their life they decided. Maybe God is the only one who knows what your "defining moment" is. But you had that moment where all of a sudden in your heart you believe.

CB: Kind of how it was for me during sixth grade confirmation. I don't remember a whole lot about it, but I remember getting my Young Reader's Bible from the pastor, but other than that, that was about it. But when I think back, that is probably—it wasn't a lightning bolt sensation or anything—but that was probably the moment.

?: I think of you are asked this question they have, they want to know how they can have a relationship. If you have been in conversation about your relationship with Christ, and so you know the person more than somebody walking up to you off the street saying, "how can I have a relationship like yours?" —I think that you can discern what their issues are and know them. You've taken time to know them well enough to know how to answer them. I don't think you're going to have one answer for every single person, because every person's place in life is different and, uh, I think we need to use discernment.

CC: I would say in my experience that some people are just not comfortable going to another person by themselves. So for me, you know, I offer Bible study and come together once a week or whatever and just, you know, introduce them to Christ. Then they can make that decision for themselves. But some of them are uncomfortable for themselves just stepping out. I mean, in my experience most people don't do that. They say, "Yeah, I want to know Christ", but they don't have the motivation to go. You know

how the enemy is always throwing obstacles in the way, keeping them from church. So, take them by the hand and take them to church; it works better.

ME: If the same person asks you how they can have a relationship, I would probably use the words, “You must be born again” and then secondarily, the second part, “How would you feel?” Uh, you know, it doesn’t happen on a daily basis, but I know I have been in situations where I have seen people, uh, come to that realization and, whether it is eurobic or euphoric, it’s just amazing. And, I mean, if somebody would ever ask me how to have a relationship, I would not be able to contain my joy and excitement. I hope I would be okay, but in regards to the second part of the question, I just wanted to address that.

JS: Anybody else? How would you feel?

?: It can be scary—that you would say the wrong thing or offend them.

MB: I have to say I have. I can sit and talk about theological issues and things like that but when it comes right down to, uh, explaining, you know, the relationship, explaining how to get saved, it totally messes me up. So, I usually, I tend to go for an artistic form. My teacher talks about the art form and the point of the agogic moment, he calls it. It is a moment of change within that piece of art, that piece of mime, drama, movie, whatever. But it makes people stop and go, “Wow.” And it changes them and, uh, you know, like for instance, *The Passion*, that movie. That movie had, uh, an incredible moment of change, uh, in S.’s and my relationship. But it was through that, that he gained an understanding of Christ’s role in what He did. I could never have explained it that way. It took an art form to explain it and understand and lead him to make that decision.

PP: What was that moment called again?

MB: Agogic, A-G-O-G-I-C. It’s Greek and I can’t remember, but I think it is “change.” It’s pretty incredible.

JS: Let’s dig a little deeper and read through several of Jesus’ resurrection words:
[Participants read John 20:21-23, Luke 24:45-49, John 21:15-19]

JS: So we looked at these scriptures today and the pastor referred to them in the message. Let’s list the things Jesus asked of his disciples in the resurrection appearances. Some may not have been mentioned in the message.

BB: One of things he said to Thomas was to stop doubting and believe.

JS: Make disciples.

MB: The words that were spoken today, “Let’s get out there!”

TC: That’s imperative. Make disciples.

ME: In regard to the specific verse it says to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the trinity and teach them to observe all that I have commanded. I will be with you always. Just prior to that it says, "All authority has been given to me; therefore, do these things." So we can go out with gumption and know that it is all taken care of and it is all alright. One of the things that kept jumping out for me was "all I have commanded you." And then you [pastor] started talking about the Sermon on the Mount, the Good News. What is the Good News? I think it is fun to think about: go make disciples. But what are the specifics within, uh, Christ's words that we are to actually be teaching? What is the Good News? And what is it that we are to teach them to observe? I think that sometimes we get caught up in semantics but not specifics. But I loved the baptizing and communion. It is a full circle ideal of exactly what God is. He reconciles us back to him and then we can communicate with him. Every time we eat and drink I always do it on specific communion times, but when it says every time you eat and drink, remember me. Know me. Because he knows we are human beings and we need to eat and drink to survive. So every time you eat and drink, think about Christ!

PD: And love one another as I have loved you.

TC: You have to understand the mission. What is a disciple? I have always felt it is someone who has accepted Christ as their Savior. We have God's message, the Gospel, the word "teaching" because not everyone has that gift. But just what C. was saying, how you are talking to someone and telling them about your life and explaining those things, you are teaching without realizing you are teaching. And we do it every day with our actions and our words.

ME: In regard to the word "disciples", its close derivative leads to discipline and, uh, putting ourselves under the discipleship or under God's discipline and not under our own discipline. And, of course, Jesus said, "as I commanded you." He commanded to love one another. His yoke is easy but we want to make it so hard. But if that is the discipline, that he wants us to put ourselves under the discipline of God's love, he doesn't want to make it so hard.

CM: Going back to all the things we have talked about in relationship to this and I keep coming back to everybody seems to be putting a lot of emphasis on "I've got to do it right" when I talk about God. Most of the time you are not going to be the last person. It may be a chain of 15 to 20 people. You might be the first person or you might be the last person in the chain. I would think, "Listen to what God tells you."

?: I can think of a couple of circumstances where I know that I have not been the only person to come into contact with a person. I am not the only person who will encompass them and take them under my wing and guide them. One person, or many, because I know I'm not the person this time. But then, I'm holding them up in prayer.

JS: Anything else Jesus asked his disciples in the resurrection appearances?

CC: Foot washing. And that is one of the most dramatic services I have ever, ever experienced and the reconciliation that is there. Family, community, unity and oneness is there. It has not been recreated in any other situation.

ME: In regards to football and Don Shula, the love of the game brought them the championship and I think that sometimes we don't realize that we are in a game. I think that often times we just, you know, Christianity is just something, "Hey God, we're just cool." But we are actually in this super bowl. It is a game that is constantly going. I just wanted to make that point.

JS: What do you believe Jesus asks of his disciples today?

?: The same thing. Teach and to trust in God and worship him. Believe in him. It's not hard. It is very basic. Very simple, but the way you go at it and the things you encounter and the process may make it hard.

CM: Open our hearts with hospitality.

MB: Love unceasingly. You know how you were saying about the links in the chain. Maybe it is the person who is at the front door who greets you with a smile at church that makes you want to stick around. And that you know, after three months of being completely uncomfortable, comes to the recognition of who Christ is, and it may have started with just that smile.

BB: I think it was J. who talked about my grandfather who greeted him at the door the first time and it brought him back. Isn't that right J.?

JS: Yes. If the M. family was here today, I am sure they would say the same thing.

NA: I went to Granger Community Church for a while and it was really strange to me. I can remember people in the parking lot directing me. But when I got out of the car they had people all the way into the church. I don't know if they still do that. And it was so neat because you would go give feet and someone would shake my hand and I would go another five feet and someone else would shake my hand and welcome me. I just remember that.

JS: Thank you. Let's complete this sentence, "The purpose of the church . . ."

CC: To build each other up so that we can gain the strength that we need to go out.

DL: Worship God. Worship God. You will get the strength. I think it is always the purpose of the church to worship God and make disciples of people.

JS: I think that all of us are to be the Body of Christ.

ME: So the purpose of the church then is to be the physical Christ in the world as we are, uh, the Body of Christ. The church building possibly could just be a nice gas station.

TC: A place to equip the saints.

JS: Alright, as we begin to come to a close, how do these responses relate to what we personally value or what Evangel Heights values?

ME: I remember the pastor's core mission statement about hope at our Leadership Summit. I forgot it all. Anyhow, the hope of reconciliation and communion—the hope to give the people a “no fear” life style based on the fact we put ourselves under the discipline of love—God's love as opposed to our own haphazard ways.

JS. Yeah!

DL: Hopefully what we talk about is what we personally value. Christ is a personal thing and a community thing. And as what we believe Evangel Heights values, those values are Christian values.

CM: I just feel like now lately, I feel like as a church, the building up is in process because to me this class has been so helpful and so good. And now since you have been here [refers to pastor] the building up is started. The building up of the Body.

JS: What are some of the things that take us out of our comfort zone? As we talk about these values, what are all the things that take you out of your comfort zone?

ME: Loving one another. Clothing the naked and being the homeless into your home. I really would have a hard time. It would take me out of my comfort zone to love in that particular way, to have somebody just come into my home. I would probably be more like the Samaritan guy who would take the guy to the next hotel and pay for it instead of having them at my house. That would be to love out. To bring in is tougher.

DL: If you are giving of yourself, you're loving out. And every time you give of yourself whether you pay for someone's hotel room or by talking to them about Christ or converting them, you are giving of yourself and you are loving them.

BB: But it is the comfort zone thing that he is talking about there and I think he is right. I think a lot of us would be very uncomfortable with that. You know, there are certain parts of life we don't want to deal with because we are comfortable right where we are. Hey, I'm doing really well here. I don't want to step out.

DL: But it is easy to give money.

BB: Yeah right. Because you are looking at affecting your life here. When you give money and put it somewhere, a change is going on in your family at that moment. But when you are doing something very sacrificial which means you are doing something you

normally would not do—by taking someone and bringing them into your home—I mean, you are putting yourself into a very vulnerable spot.

MD: You are getting involved and that is very difficult.

DL: Just the fact that you talked to that person, you take that person to the hotel room or take the person to get the food or wherever, you are involved. So you are involved, as you said, you're personal comfort level. So I think it is a personal thing with each person.

ME: I remember reading about this pastor who walked into the church and there was this gentleman. There was a whole group of his faculty or whatever there. Then there was this disheveled man who was just over in the corner and he just walked in and the minister said who is that man. The group said they didn't know. The man had been there about thirty minutes and also wanted to know why the group hadn't talked to him. The pastor walked over to the man and realized that he was very messed up. So in regards he took him out for lunch and tried to talk to him about Christ's love. Long story short or longer, it ended up that the man kept coming and kept showing up. He finally asked the man if he was ready to make a decision about God and Jesus. But he was out of his comfort zone.

JS: Thank you everyone. We'll need to stop here for today.

Focus Group Six
Value Added Community
Acts 2:42-47
February 5, 2006

Ref. # 13/22/28/30//3/10

Getting Started:

When you hear the word "community" what do you think of?

Describe what the ideal *church* community would look like to you .

Digging Deeper:

Briefly recall the specific list of characteristics in Acts 2:42-47.

We mentioned that Acts 2 comprises the first a several "progress reports" in the development of the early church. Take a look at Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:30-31 briefly to see other progress reports. What are some of the common denominators in these progress reports?

Application:

Place yourself in the Acts 2 Jerusalem church. Describe your feelings as to what being in this type of community would be like.

What of the Acts 2 characteristics are still possible (or necessary) today in order to be a “Value Added Community”?

Transcript of Focus Group Six
“Value Added Community”
Acts 2:42-47
February 12, 2006

JS: We are going to start off kind of like Pastor Pat did this morning. When you hear the word “community” what do you think of?

JS: Family

ME: My initial thought when I was reading the passage was communion. Because, take it for what it is. They take everything in and then they spread, for that was the general thought of the communists.

(Laughter)

JS: Looks good on paper.

JC: As somebody who has been in business work for a long time, I always think of corporation. Each corporation believe it or not has its own culture.

JS: What do you think of when you hear community?

TC: I think of solidarity.

ME: They’re, like, subdivisions. Those subdivision communities. Like what he was saying about Amish, Baptists, as well as housing subdivisions. Those are different communities.

JS: Describe what the ideal church community would look like to you.

TM: No denominations. No separations of any type of laws. Just what it was supposed to have been at the very beginning.

LM: Varied people. I mean all kinds of people.

ME: People getting together throughout the week, all the time. Just like having a dinner and movie every night and games for kids, that kind of community. That seems to be my vision of the ideal church.

JS: You’re a child of the 60’s!

(laughter)

TM: Being the church is something that is very alive, very strong, very exciting music, very exciting. You know, just very exciting and everything based on the principles of the Bible.

ME: I have one word that reminds us of community: communicate. And I think that a church family *talks* to each other and is involved and really communicates with each other is an alive church.

MD: I was thinking sort of along that idea of being able to bring fresh ideas and to discuss them instead of arguing about them. I mean what you were saying, it would be nice to have a perfect, uh, community, but we need to be able to bring fresh ideas. We need to not always totally agree with each other, because I think if we agree with each other, constantly, we can go off the wrong way.

MB: I think in order to have a strong community like that with new ideas we need to recognize they are going to be controversial, but if you really believe that and people are good over a long haul, the best idea emerges. Now, in real life there are power struggles and all that, but I think, honestly, that if everybody agreed, it would be terribly boring. So part of my growth is hearing conflicting things and trying to assimilate that into my life.

ME: Part of the mission is to bring up.

MB: That is one of my Christian strengths.

TC: But in community, it is kind of generic to what the Bible calls community. Every community is united in thought. Whether there are different opinions, family size, color, every different diversity, the community develops opinions, theological understandings. But there is one thing that unifies our family. And I guess, uh, the key thing for me is that the ideal family, I mean community, is identifying that one thing. That has the glue and is going to stick us together. That is going to bond the whole community. Maybe it is Christ.

LM: Ideally, for a church community, I would hope that that one thing would be Christ, but that is not always the case.

TC: That goes back to last week; they are tied into together.

SS: In what way?

TC: The mission. We have this one mission. We have this one thing to do, uh, we have the Gospel and there is the point of making disciples based on the Gospel. I mean that is the one thing that unites the mission and the purpose for us.

SK: I think sharing is part of community. It talks about in the scripture today about how they met the needs of the other people. You know, even if it is as simple as, uh, like in a neighborhood, we have a neighbor lady across the street who doesn't have a snow blower. So when we get a lot of snow, we share that common thing that we have. And I think that there are other skills or actual things you know that we can share. I don't have something but T. might have one so we borrow it. You know, I mean that kind of a thing. Sometimes there are those resources even within your church that you do not even know, a resource, a committee even has.

PD: I like that one comment you said [referring to message] "I gives way to we." I liked that. We are the community, Christ-like community.

MB: I think that in a good community, too, we have to be open or we also have to be not afraid to rebuke one another when someone is doing something that is not right. And we also have to be open to that being rebuked. We need to be able to stop and look at ourselves and say, "Oh, yeah, I am not doing something right. Thank you for telling me that."

TC: There is accountability.

MB: Accountability. Exactly. This is something we are kind of lacking in our churches these days at times, the denominations. When we come together, we just, but then again we just focus on, oh well, you're doing that wrong you know. You're dipping instead of sprinkling and, you know, we get stuck on those little things instead of looking at the bigger picture. Oh! Okay! You believe Jesus is the Savior. Great! Let's start from there. Instead of, you know, one little thing. That's what really drives me crazy. The community is when we work together!

TC: There is a whole concept in popular culture when we believe in this romanticism. We have this romantic picture of the church. It's about accountability.

MB: I think a good example of that is, look at the Olympics, I mean, ten or fifteen years ago how exciting was it when we heard about the Olympics. Everybody was glued to the television. Now, Winter Olympics, "Oh, big deal, you know, we don't care." It's about what I want to watch. Oh well, you know, so what, you don't care. It was about how we came together as a country and as a world to celebrate athletics. But now we don't care anymore. Nobody really. I mean, how many of you in this room are excited about the Winter Olympics. [Several raise their hands] I mean, there are a few, but it's not as much as it used to be.

ME: It's personal.

MB: Yeah, I mean, we have kind of lost that community I think.

BE: Well, I can't say it word for word, but over at River Valley Church, they have all their values printed each week on the back of their bulletin. And one of them said, "We

are united in belief.” There was a really interesting quote that I am not going to be able to come up with, sorry.

ME: You mean the part that we are all different part of Christ’s Body. We are all different things?

BE: Yeah! Sorry, I can’t think of it.

JC: I think there are two ways that you can become part of a community, whether a church community or a corporate community, or neighborhood, or whatever. One way is that you carry certain views, values, desires. You seek out a community that fits you. The other way is that you end up in a community by circumstance and then you become involved in their culture.

ME: Kind of like birthright or re-birthright.

TM: Well? Like you said J., even in the corporate community you can be pulled in and just be there and not be active. So I think part of being in that community is, if you are going to be in that community, you have to be active in it, not just sitting on the sidelines.

JC: But don’t you think, T., that if you are part of corporate community and it doesn’t match your personal ethos that you get out.

ME: Yeah.

TC: And that is why different churches have different bodies and you pick one based on what you can embrace.

TM: The right thing is to get out. Not many of us get into it because of the fear of getting out. We kind of stay in something that we know.

JC: Trapped.

TM: Yeah. And it is like they don’t really want to be here, but they are very hesitant to move on to something else because they don’t know what’s out there.

TC: But T., you said something about being in a community but not being active. I mean, how can you not be active?

DL: If you are part of that community you are active.

[multiple interruptions]

BE: As a fund raiser, I can tell you the 80-20 rule comes into play.

TC: We are talking about an ideal community.

JS: That's right.

TC: The ideal community. How can you have membership without being active in the ideal community? Because maybe that is the problem with church as a community now.

JS: Okay. Let's dig a little deeper with our next question, briefly recall the specific list of characteristics in Acts 2:42-47.

ME: They devoted to the teaching and praying of the apostles. They shared all things. They had daily gathering. They daily gathered together and praised God and broke bread together.

JS: OK. Anybody else.

JC: You know one of the real miracles of the first century is how this group of very diverse people came together. Not just in Israel, but in Galilee, throughout Asia Minor, even into Rome. The amazing thing is not just a spiritual thing, but that those people were putting their very lives at risk. How that miracle happened is one of the great miracles of the church, the coming together of that very diverse group over time. That community drifted from being basically a Hebrew community to being primarily a Gentile community. Paul would seem to be one of the great facilitators of that.

TC: Do you think the circumstances in the background, the persecutions and being a group of people who were down and they had to pull together for survival facilitated that?

JC: To survive. Right.

TC: Remember that little fish sign that we see, that little secret code that the other was my brother.

ME: It is easier to be a Gentile Christian, a Roman Christian, than it was to be Jewish Christian, that's for sure.

JS: What else can you tell me about the characteristics of this church?

LM: Many were being saved.

BE: The irony is that they were in the temple doing this.

JS: Okay, tell us the irony.

BE: Well, it is a dichotomy on the Christians and the Jews.

MB: In a way, at the time they, the Jewish Christians, were just another sect. They were just like another denomination within Judaism because they happened to believe that the Messiah had come. It was the others who didn't believe. They were just a small group that were believing that. So it was like just having another denomination. So they were just meeting, you know, a different group. They had the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and then they had the Messianics. They believed he had already come and, hey, what's one more? We have quite a melting pot going on here in Rome and in Jerusalem. One more is not going to hurt us.

KP: What I find interesting is that they devoted themselves to breaking of the bread and prayer. Breaking of the bread as Christ said, they mentioned no wine. They devoted to the bread and they also devoted to meditation and prayer.

BE: I view it as the symbolism of bread, just

KP: Yes, but these are the Apostles. These are the people that Jesus knew. Jesus said go out into the world and teach because I am not going to be around. So, here is my bread and here is my blood. So why is the wine not mentioned?

JS: Are you looking at verse 42?

KP: Yes. But then it goes on to say that everyone was filled with awe and the wonders and miraculous signs were done by the Apostles. So there are miracles happening.

JS: In my version it says sharing the Lord's Super. What do others say?

KP: I think it is interesting because in that time the fellowship was to break bread because of no utensils. No different than, you know, growing up in my household, we didn't break bread as much as we wanted fellowship. We didn't go to the dining room which you have here in the city, we went to the kitchen because that is where we went, because it is part of the culture. And then it said later on and then "all the believers went together and had everything in common." In listening, a lot of the words everyone was mentioning "co". Whether it was company, continent, country, common, commune, community, communism. But you know, core, core values. Co!

JS: Wow! Okay. Any others?

SK: Well, I like where it talks about "awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles." I think a lot of times, even here in the church, we do that WOW. And a lot of stuff that happens is circumstance in our minds and not given to the glory of God which is what it actually is. You know, sometimes I think we don't see the miracles because we think they are man made producing what happens as opposed to God made things that happen in the church.

LM: Well, I think that is partly the product of society. We have so watered down and washed out our awe of God. I mean, I am not just talking about now, I am talking about

through time. That true *awe* for God, you know. That is to some weird. That is not God. That is this or how can you possibly think so? So what God originally stirred in us to just really be on fire, over time, you know, society has sort of like, went, uh, uh, don't do that. You know.

ME: Well, we have a fix for everything. So why do we need God.

KP: What is interesting, if you look into it, you continue and then your "glad and sincere hearts." How many of us have sincere hearts? So there is a strong-ness. Then they continue to say, "enjoying the favor, the good will of all the people." Not just the people that they broke bread with, not just the people with whom they were meditating, but all the people and all of God's people.

JS: You said there's "strong-ness in sincere hearts"?

KP: I look at it like sometimes religion is like a diet. We all want to have that perfect body and get in shape, but we start the diet and in this new year of whenever, to do it and how many of us stay with it? And how many of us really tear down and open our hearts in a very humble and sincere way?

NA: Pastor Pat said about fellowship in churches . . . he was so great when he said about "breaking of bread," it doesn't matter what you are eating, it should be together. I will stand here and say we do not go to fast food restaurants; we do eat together. When the kids are home, all of them, I would say at least five days a week, which I am like patting myself on the back for that. But, you want to hear something that just irritates me to death. And I am so happy he said this statement. "What are we eating" I hate that. I don't know why I hate it, but I hate it. It makes me angry; it makes me just furious. It is like, but maybe it is a little bit; I am going to try the response that the pastor said. It doesn't matter what we're eating, what did you say? "What are we going to have?" "We are going to have fellowship!" I'm going to see how that works.

CC: I'm the same way.

[Laughter]

JS: Let's move on, we mentioned that Acts 2 was like a progress report for the early church. And there are several other passages like this in Acts. I have asked several of you ahead of time to read these passages. Look for the common denominators in these reports.

[Group members read Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 16:5, Acts 19:20, Acts 12:24, and Acts 28:30-31.]

JS: Alright. So, what are some of the common denominators in these progress reports?

CC: Growth and increase.

JS: Word of God.

ME: Peace.

MB: Openness to the word of the Lord, it had spread so much.

ME: Boldness.

JS: What else?

JC: They are all characterized by growth and expansion. Huge expansion in the church.

KP: Hungry people out there.

JS: Yeah.

ME: Spiritually, physically and emotionally.

LM: Well, I think you said there are so many people out there, but just to add to that, I think they are in here, too.

KP: We all are. And it's kind of neat. We are all sales people, too.

JS: How?

KP: Like that comment earlier, "we should never be out of the community." So we should never be out of the core values.

TC: I have been thinking about it, uh

CC: Oh dear! When he starts thinking, look out!

[Laughter]

TC: Let us look at cult denominations. Cult-like to be more polite, uh, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, and what I've been a part of, Adventists. The community is tremendous. If you have ever been along to see the witness of the Mormons—the community that exists in these groups! It seems to me after thinking about it, all of the things they have in common, those denominations, is a strong sense of mission, purpose and value. The Adventists have a message for the end time and the church calling back for repentance. Jehovah's Witness have a strong message for a dying world. Mormons have the same kind of strong mission statement. Whenever the church has a strong mission statement, a strong call to rally behind, the community, everything falls into place. And the second thing you notice about those denominations, they are the fastest growing denominations in America and around the world also. So it seems like, but how many times it is no big deal because some denominations really don't have a strong mission to rally around.

Maybe a sense of identity of who we are. I am going to say what I know most. Adventists call themselves the remnant of God. That is the identity. We are called the Remnant Church. That is a strong identity. The mission is that we have a message to a dying world. And with that comes the growth, numerical growth, especially outside of America. With that comes a sense of mission. This is a mission, growth, community. So it seems to me that where the core values are and a mission is identified, it kind of gives you a sense of self-identity also. We are Evangel Heights. Our mission is this. That evangelism, the outreach, the community, the growth, everything comes together automatically because of that.

JC: T., do you think the discipline of the church has a lot to do with it? In other words, all the churches you mentioned have a strong discipline within their faith. You must think this way, you must do this, you must go out and be a missionary over a certain period of years. In other words, they are demanding. I think where some of our denominations have fallen down, other denominations, they don't demand anything.

TC: Yeah. Like Willow Creek Church. To be a member of Willow Creek, there are strong demands also on that community and this is by no means a cult church, this is a normal evangelical church. And yet still, you have values; it's accountability. That's it. It seems that everything falls together. When there is no value, no mission, no form of self-identity, then there is no need for accountability, which is another reason for no rules. Well, for all the others, as J. has mentioned, they are so busy being politically correct and being nice that it doesn't really matter at that point.

LM: Well it, just like you said before and J. just said, you don't have to participate in the community. You can be a part of it without the participation. Whereas, like the ones you are talking about, you must participate. You are here for a reason. Your participation is required in this community for us to grow and go forward.

TC: That is why places, and I don't mean to be a spokesman for the pastor, but that is the genius of trying to come up with core values because that is what every one rallies around. When that is done, who are we? What are we here for? What do we do? So we just come here to go to church have coffee and then, there is nothing to rally around? Mission! What do you think pastor?

PP: Well, you know how hard it is for me to be an observer. May I add simply, "amen" to that!

ME: When he mentions discipline, it brings to mind the word disciple which brings to mind the great commission which we have all talked about. Now, if we do not do this ourselves, individually, in this church, under the discipline and the discipleship of Christ and the Apostles, what they are saying here? "They devoted themselves completely to the apostles teaching and to the discipline of Christ" None of these things will happen for us. There are no core values because there is no discipline. So there is no drive and you know I think we are heading toward a very rough ending to this situation, which you know, anyway, discipline and disciple which is exactly what we have talked about, putting

ourselves individually under the discipleship of Christ and then all of these things sort of are possible.

TC: Just want to qualify what I said. All of these extreme denominations . . . the only problem with them is that is what brings them together is always outside of Christ. They are always united on some kind of doctrine and most of the doctrines are man made. But imagine having a community that center around what really matters in the Bible. Not how long their dress is, or shaved faces, but Christ.

ME: That is the same with us. It creates a deception based on truth. There are truthful things, but the deception comes when we are not looking at the Bible.

TM: You need to hold people accountable.

NA: I agree. You need to be held accountable to a set of values. But one of my experiences, what if all of a sudden I disagree and I decide that I need to leave. And all of a sudden now where do I go? I am no longer a member of your cult. Now who is going to take me in? And am I going to fall away from Christ? Another one is a big cult in my eyes because I have had some experience with it in the past is Pentecostal religion. And I have read an essay written by a little nine-year-old from a Pentecostal Church and she said, "In order to get to heaven, and you are a woman, you must wear a dress. You must never cut your hair, you must, and I cannot remember them all, but they were all things that you needed to do. If you are a man, you must never have facial hair, you must, you know, all things, that you needed to do. Never once did she mention in her essay anything about believing Jesus was Savior, loving God, nothing like that. Secondly, I come from a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church which is an extremely strict church, and I was divorced. I could not go back to that church. Who could take me in? All of a sudden I am lost. I have nowhere to go. So you have to be careful, you don't want to go, okay, it's okay, every one can get divorced and everyone can do whatever they want. I don't mean that, but you have to be careful with these cults because as long as you are inside the cult, everything is great and everything is wonderful. But when you are on the outside, you don't belong to them; they don't want to have anything to do with you. And that is pretty much true. If you decide you don't want to go along with their values. And then, also, if you are a member, and all of a sudden you stumble, which we all will, now what? Where do you go?

TM: When you focus on Jesus Christ himself, that is okay for those things. You know, those other groups you are talking about, that isn't their true focus—on Christ. If the true focus is on Christ and his true belief, then, yes, you can hold people accountable because of certain requirements.

JS: Okay. We need to move on to application. We always get to this last part and we rarely have enough time for it. Place yourself in Acts 2 Jerusalem Church. Describe your feelings as to what being in this type of community would be like.

BE: I don't know if you guys were at the beginning when you were talking about community. A couple years ago, when we had the ice storm that knocked out the power, do you remember that? The people that had the houses that actually had the electric . . . and my parents got theirs early and they had the fire burning on all the time. We had people coming in, the little ladies from across the street that we had not had contact with before because they didn't have any heat on and they needed to get warm. It just, to me, there was such a warmth and generosity and, living in community. I just think there is so much to be said for living in community. I think it is cost effective. I think it is, you know, loving and sharing. And I think that is exactly what they were going through. What's mine is yours. And I have the heat so come on over and enjoy it.

?: I think it would be great. I am hoping that they realized what their accomplishments were, with all these growing numbers and think their feelings would be accomplishments for getting out and spreading the word.

ME: I placed myself in Acts 2 in Jerusalem having lived in this post-modern society church. I would believe I would have reservations in this like what we talked about last week about going outside of our comfort zone. Sometimes, I think, we have such a very private, uh, private lives. You know, everything is in our house. We can shop; we never have to leave our house anymore. It would be a little different to be living in that type of community, that open, in, out, you know, it might be hard to do.

?: Belonging.

CC: It is cult-like, but you feel so loved. You feel it's family. I mean, we are together. You know at church and outside of church during the week. It mean, it is like when one hurts, everybody else hurts. We come together, I mean, we are always together. We do everything together, during church time and outside church time. This person needs their bills paid, everybody is chipping in, I mean. It feels great. But like N. said, you get away from them or you don't believe some of them, you're just outside. But it is an awesome feeling and I miss that. I mean every Sabbath after church, you got together and had pot-luck and hung out and went to the parks and walked around. I mean we just did everything together. And it is an awesome feeling. You know and like T. said, you can go anywhere in the world and there is an Adventist. They say come on over to my house, it is like having a family member wherever you go. It feels so good and, yet, Friday night, I was invited to once a month, they had black students, a program every Friday. Once a month they come together white and black and they have a praise and worship.

?: Caring.

?: Accountable.

JS: Last question: Is it still possible and necessary to be an Acts 2 community? What does it take to be a "Value Added Community?"

ME: Openness to love each other

TM: I think you have to be not afraid to offend somebody and not afraid to get offended.

KP: I would say this goes along with feelings and characteristics, that whole thing. I mean, once you get a group together you are kind of like electricity and everybody is heated up. When you are alone you kind of are withering. So, when people are gathered together for Christ, there is an energy that you don't get when you're not.

JS: An electricity.

ME: When I grew up Baptist, we used to have pot-lucks. To know that you had true friends that have the same core belief systems that you can call on in times of need, it is awesome.

CC: It is kind of like you are excited about God. They are so excited about God, they might be completely wrong about what they believe, but the excitement for God is just so great. I felt that way last Friday night. I came home it was just like, I plopped down and said, "Oh my God!"

JS: Is it still possible and necessary?

LM: Yes it is necessary and yes it is possible and not without some changes!

ME: One of the characteristics is letting people know what needs are needed and everybody gives to that end.

JS: Do you think it is possible?

KP: Yes I think it is but difficult because of the way people are very *me* oriented. It is difficult to get out of that because Satan perpetuates that. And it is tough, but possible.

LM: I think it is happening. Other than that you said, we have friends, different churches that are Christ believing churches. That stuff does happen. It is not an impossibility for that to happen even here. But it is very different and I think it would be very difficult.

?: I think fellowshiping is. You start by that—coming together more. People want socialization. When you get together and you are fellowshiping, it does something.

JC: Back to John Wesley and his quadrilateral. Some churches over time lose their values. You have to get back to them.

ME: The movement in society today is a very, very Satanic, Satan driven movement which basically emotionally segregates each person from everybody else. To me, that is exactly what Satan wants to do, he moves people away from other people. So, the only way to counteract that is to get together and talk about God. And I think that is the most Christian thing you can do, get back together.

Focus Group Seven
“Passing the Dish” February 19, 2006
Acts 6:1-7

Ref. # 1/2/13/30//10

Getting Started

Complete these sentences:

When I disagree with someone I....

When I am faced with a problem at church I....

Digging Deeper

In today’s story in Acts 6:1-7, who are the key players and what roles do they play?

Compare and contrast Acts 2:42-47 to Acts 6:1-7. What conclusions do you draw from reading these two passages together?

Application

What role does the pastor play in forging the values of the local church?

In what ways has Evangel Heights historically attempted to solve problems when they arise?

Transcript of Focus Group Seven
“Passing the Dish”
Acts 6:1-7
February 19, 2006

[Transcriber’s note: the tape and back-up tape system both failed to record properly during this session. Significant gaps occur in the transcript.]

LM: We need to complete some sentences. When I disagree with someone, I...

[Inaudible]

ME: I would say that I try to think about their perspective and see if it makes any sense to me and just sort of mull it over in my head. Unless we were in a specific situation [inaudible].

[Inaudible]

JM: Are you now!

MB: You evaluate [inaudible]. If it is not, you find what you can agree with [inaudible]

LM: When I am faced with a problem at church I...

[Inaudible]

ME: Whisper about it.

[Inaudible]

ME: When I have bad issues, sometimes I just say, "you know what?" [inaudible] I don't understand this [inaudible]. The best way [inaudible]

[Inaudible]

MB: I Take it home, discuss it. If you're angry about it – yell, holler, and all that stuff. Then let go; handle it. N.'s better able to handle it than I am because [inaudible]. But I have a hard time with that because I have had issues with [inaudible]. In fact I tried to let go, you know, and see what happens. Sometimes it gets so far that I [inaudible]. That is why I came back here. I just found that I could just not take it anymore. Because I was listening to a certain side of people and it's too much; I just had it.

[Inaudible]

LM: I agree that [inaudible] because I have gone to people when I have had trouble at church, different people and would like to say [inaudible]. I whine and complain [inaudible] for all the right reasons, but when we were talking [inaudible].

NA: I just don't feel that the church is a place for arguments with people. You know, it just feels like that it's not. I just feel very strongly about this, like it's not right. I don't want to go into problems. I'm not thinking it is right. So I think I move on [inaudible]. I love a lot of people at Coalbush, but it is not a place where I wanted to get into an argument with someone. I guess [inaudible] it either [inaudible] by their point. But I don't want to change my side. So I move and I don't actually need a body of people for my faith in God. I have my own faith. I like to attend church so it strengthens my faith and other things, but I guess if I felt it was important enough that I hated the church maybe I would move on. But I [inaudible] and I need to [inaudible] that point in time, I guess [inaudible] one church in 30 years so but [inaudible] I guess [inaudible] fits my needs. This may sound silly, but that is where I am right now. [Inaudible] unless someone is extremely [inaudible].

MB: I think that is what the problem is. If it is, "Do I light the left candle or the right candle first," you know, or you know, whether, you know, that or a doctrinal problem

where someone is taking a completely opposite of tradition, scripture, experience, everything. When someone is saying God said that . . . whether it, you know, in Sunday School or from the pulpit or in whatever, in discussion, I think it depends on what the problem is. If it is a matter of salvation issue, then yeah, it needs to be discussed and make sure that we are not leading people astray. But if it has to do with what color the carpet is, it doesn't really matter, you know, it doesn't matter.

ME: In regards to the text and regards to what I said previously about just talking to people about it, what could be considered a problem: "The greasy wheel gets the oil" type of thing. I mean, somewhere along the line someone had to say something to somebody who had to say "Okay, yeah, we do need to address this." So it sort of does kind of start in, you know, small group muttering about something. But the, you know, it's where you take it. You can take it subversively [inaudible].

MB: [Inaudible] few years ago. Faction of the church [inaudible]. They were very emotionally involved. [Inaudible] I'm still here. [Inaudible]

LM: In today's story in Acts 6:1-7, who were the key players and what roles do they play?

ME: The Hellenist Church, Hebrews, I can't remember. Okay, so basically, like, disciples, apostles, the group coming together and [inaudible] believers [inaudible].

[Inaudible]

BV: Diaspora [inaudible] spreading a message to [inaudible] throughout the Diaspora. I guess my whole point is that the developing Christian Church [inaudible].

ME: The basic difference between the two groups, then was language primarily?

[Inaudible]

MB: I think [inaudible] you have Hellenists and Hebrews. The Hellenists, I am assuming that they would be the Jews who have kind of converted to cultural standards of the day. You know, they did not necessarily dress and talk like Hebrews, but they were still Jews. Their family may have been [inaudible]. I don't speak Italian, but I am Italian. I have Italian blood from my bloodlines, but I would not consider myself Italian because I can't speak Italian. I don't know anything about Italian culture. But I consider myself an American. So these guys would have been Jews but they were influenced by the culture. They were culturally part of that culture. The Hebrews would have been the guys who stuck with the rest of the laws and the eating, etc. That is how I am seeing this particular scripture. Does that make sense?

LM: Okay, let's compare Acts 2:42-27 and Acts 6:1-7. Will somebody read one of them?

[These scriptures are read]

LM: What conclusions do you draw by comparing these two passages together?

[Inaudible]

ME: The numbers grew. [Inaudible]

[Inaudible]

ME: The whole idea is that the apostles said that they couldn't take time away from our specific gift of prayer and teaching. So we need to find somebody else gifted in managing these areas in order to do that. So it is kind of the beginning of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like splitting of responsibilities based on how God [inaudible].

[Inaudible]

LM: Okay. Let's move on to application. What role does the pastor play in forging the values of the local church?

TM: [Inaudible] one person has to [inaudible]. Someone has to make that decision.

TC: Based on these scriptures [inaudible] I think that maybe [inaudible] in the church [inaudible] solution [inaudible]. I am thinking of someone coming up with the idea of [inaudible] core values, prayer, and [inaudible]. Redirected [inaudible]. Some of the suggestions on how to handle the problem move the congregation away from our mission, our focus, Christ.

ME: Bringing it back to the purpose, uh, I think the role of the pastor is to guide the sheep [inaudible].

[Inaudible]

ME: The pastors in regard to the text, to me, would be the apostles. They were the pastor of that church. And then when they got to a point where they realized "what are our priorities?" as pastors of the church, prayer and feeding the sheep, in regards to teaching God's Word is what I got out of it. But then they had enough, uh, sense to be able to say, "Let the sheep find themselves some specific leaders" so that they were able to guide the sheep into finding business managers for themselves. So they did the guiding. I get the idea that they would just stick to their gifts and help the rest of the sheep figure out their gifts. So I don't see a pastor personally being that much of, they're not the CEO and CFO, you know, they are not the, they can't be responsible for all of it. They have to be able to help the sheep find their gifts.

[Inaudible]

TC: God is guiding [inaudible].

LM: I think it is true. I think I said it in a round about way. The pastor needs to be perfect. If the pastor is saying one thing and leading in a totally different way [inaudible]. That is saying two different things and it makes it very difficult to know in what direction to go.

LM: Anybody else want to talk about the pastor's forging the value of the church before we go on?

MB: Well, one quick comment [inaudible]. So the church has to be the body of Christ and the minister has to understand that everybody has their role in the church.

LM: Thank you. Okay. In what ways has Evangel Heights historically attempted to solve problems when they arise?

TM: [Inaudible]

MB: I think our leaderships over the years, I have been here twenty five years, and it is, I mean, I think our leadership has been wise. We may have made decisions that were bad. We all make mistakes.

TM: You have been in Small Groups, and you are getting a very narrow perspective.

MB: But at the same time I think this church gives you the opening if you want to get involved in things.

LM: That's not always true. I don't think you always have that opportunity. I don't think I have always felt that. I wasn't invited to decision-making meetings. I'm not invited to Pastor Parish. I'm not invited to, whatever. There are things we don't have opportunities to say, "Hey, this is what I think." And maybe you can't do that. Maybe you can't have 400 people saying, "This is what I see we need," "This is what I think." And I am not saying that I should be invited. I am just saying that I don't always [inaudible].

ME: Sounds like that [inaudible]. Sounds like [inaudible] to make recommendations.

[Inaudible]

BE: It's what I talked about before, the 80/20 rule.

[Inaudible]

?: [Inaudible] there are a couple people who are in charge of a lot of things. I'm not mentioning any names. It is their way or the highway. A couple things I've dealt with in life and I truly don't want to take on one more thing because they are already in charge.

LM: I think you are very [inaudible]. I feel the same way. But one person in the church should not have that much control over all of that no matter what [inaudible]. Then again, it's very hard.

NA: And you are right. You need to go through the channels that you need to go through to find out who is in charge and try to talk to that person. Let's pray that they are open to the rest of the congregation. That's just fine, my idea might not be right either, but I [inaudible]. The way they respond to me is probably the same as it is to everyone. I am sure I am not that far off. But, that's okay if you have people in those positions who are going to listen. If they all of a sudden put up that wall then they are not representing whatever everybody else likes. They are just doing what they do, and that is the problem. Now, you are not going to make everybody happy, but if you are in a leadership position, you need to be able to be wise enough to listen to everyone's opinion and then you are the final decision-maker. I have no problem with that, but you need to be willing to listen to everyone and then formulate your own decision.

MB: Again, going back to what happened seven years ago, that was just a very small minority. And the leader of the Education Committee at that point [inaudible].

LM: Well, how many of the people in the church knew what was going on? [inaudible] but should have. You know, what I mean, at that point, did anybody else know?

MB: But [inaudible] what happened and stood up [inaudible]. If you stand by and let people do what serves their self interest, it is not a good way [inaudible].

ME: In reference to the scriptures. At the very beginning of the discussion, I said, "What could I do if I disagree with someone?" I think that is something that you had mentioned doing the same thing. Where, if something is bothering us, we just talk to a couple of people about it and we ask their opinion and then just sort, it either stays and festers or we just get over it or it creates a bigger issue. But what they did in the text was they go together and took it to the apostles. The apostles were able to bring them down. So what happens is if there are issues and you do find, I guess, it should be brought to the correct channels. Like we said, and hopefully, what happened to you [inaudible]. And so what happens is that when the leader of the group starts doing their own thing instead of listening to their group's opinion [inaudible].

TC: [Inaudible] that's why good leaders [inaudible] twelve people were coming [inaudible].

NA: See if this will work for your core values? Easter is the holiest of all days of the year and there will never be an Easter egg hunt. Never! End of discussion. Not allowed to discuss it one more minute. You know, you are not allowed to put candy in the Easter eggs. You could put biblical verse in the Easter eggs. You could do all kinds of thing that make eggs holy. Okay. Absolutely that is it. Now can you, could you [inaudible] core values. Could you, I'm asking this, could you compare something that small and trivial to

your core value statement and have something and compare it so that you make the right decision?

[Inaudible]

NA: Talking about the Easter bunny. I have had an Easter egg hung every year for my children and my children have never believed in the Easter bunny. So, I mean it was just very disturbing to me, ridiculous. You know, I, okay, so I am a pagan now because I have had an Easter egg hunt for my own children every year. I mean that is how it was made to make me feel that way. And I am thinking I cannot see [inaudible].

?: If every member of the church matters, then it will take [inaudible] egg, Easter? How about taking little boxes or something [inaudible].

NA: Easter egg hunts are not that important to me. I don't feel that passionate about it. It was just the way it was handled and the way it was shot down immediately.

TC: Core values.

ME: God given prophets.

LM Anything else?

[Inaudible]

Focus Group Eight
Doctor of Ministry Project
The Value Giver
I Corinthians 15:1-11

Getting Started:

What new thing have you learned about yourself or your church during this eight-week series?

What is most important to you concerning your faith life?

Digging Deeper:

Discuss the importance of what Paul says in our passage today in I Corinthians 15:1-11 to the context of what we know about the Corinthian community described in I Cor. 1.

Application:

Reflect back on the last eight weeks. If you were to write your own creed (value statement), what would you include?

Transcript of Focus Group Eight
“The Value Giver”
I Corinthians 15
February 26, 2006

LM: What new thing have you learned about yourself or your church during this eight week series?

PD: That I am inactive.

LM: That you are inactive? What do you mean by that?

PD: Instead of proactive, I’m inactive. I don’t do what he preached about today, in my eyes.

BB: What I feel I have seen in that we still have a long way to go for us to all understand what it really means to have Jesus as Savior in our lives. I think there is still some confusion on what the scriptures says and what we want to believe.

LM: Okay!

BE: I want to echo what P. said. I think I really saw myself when he was talking about WWJD. Are you reading the scripture and studying?

MD: That is how I feel, but it is not new.

LM: What new things have you learned about yourself or your church during the eight week series?

CB: What I have seen is that the church has a core spirit that is just bursting to get out. People maybe aren’t quite sure where that is going to take them and that fear and trepidation kind of holds them back a bit. But I think that there is a yearning there to do something very positive. It’s just below the surface.

LM: Okay.

TC: I was just saying that this series challenged us to do something, but we need to be proactive. It was very challenging leading to some self-introspection.

MB: I think that one thing that has been brought out here is that the church's core values should supersede the little fiefdoms that occur in every church. There are certain individuals or certain small groups that consider what they do for the church is their little fiefdom and the core values actually need to supersede that fiefdom. And, yes, those people and individuals have done a tremendous job in being this church, but at the same time, I think that their thing that we have to examine what the motives are and try to tear down those fiefdoms at one point or another. Or maybe not tear them down, but certainly examine the fiefdom to make sure that that is really what the church wants. You just open up a whole can of worms when you do that. Those fiefdoms are there for a reason.

?: What is a fiefdom?

?: Yes, please!

MD: A fiefdom is like a little, like, when you are a king and you rule over certain areas. That is what a fiefdom is. It is an area that you feel you have control over.

TC: [Inaudible] values [inaudible]. Those values; we recognize them. But it seems like it is not the central part of the church. Although we all agree with them and we all are excited about them, but it is not really [inaudible] because of those fiefdoms.

CB: Those are the things that keep us from stepping out and making room for others.

TC: [Inaudible] those values.

MB: We kind of need to get out of that "this is the way we have always done it." We stay within our own little space. We have done that. We don't like to venture out of that comfort zone, even if our comfort zone is not square with our values. We are just stuck there.

LM: Alright.

MB: One additional thing is once you start, if you try to remove, try to re-educate in that type of situation, you are going to create chaos for a short time, or maybe a longer time. [Inaudible] church ranking. So that is why everybody is afraid to do it because of the chaos. Then the controversy is going to result. But that is where the core values have to be in place first before you can truly release people.

CB: The potential for fall-out is certain. Without those values in place, it is not going to reassemble in anything.

MB: You are going to have a goal-less, a lack of goals within the church. So what if you have a fiefdom, that is not appropriate without a goal. Tearing it down is not good.

PK: One of the things that I have learned is that we have what we say of our core values. However, we are very inward focused. We are focused about what we are as a Body of Christ here at Evangel Heights, and how we minister to one another. But we are not focused about what Christ has charged us to do and that is to go out into the world. He said, “come unto me: but he also said “go.” We are good about the coming sometimes, but we are not really good about the “go.” But I don’t know that we really understand values or about core values.

CB: We revere them but we do not put them into practice.

MD: You said a mouthful.

LM: So what is most important to you concerning your faith life?

CC: That I wouldn’t disappoint God. That I do what he is teaching and that I am not just being inward and that I am going also. That I am serving and doing what he asked me to do.

PK: The most important thing to me for my faith life is to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, that above any other thing. Because I know as a human I will not be able to live up to the standard. I will continually fall short. However, if I have an intimate relationship with Christ, I can hear his voice telling me when I have fallen short. I can ask for forgiveness. I can go forward. I can attempt to do the things that he is leading me to do and following the path he has set for me for my mind.

CC: I want to say that what is important to me, regardless of how I fall short, in sin, I am still comfortable and able to come to him in all that mess and have a relationship. Because, sometimes, when we have fallen short or doing things we should not be doing, we tend to back off and hide. I still have an open relationship.

CB: Growing up, we are all told that God and Jesus are always there for you. But as you get older, in the recent years, I have recently begun to understand just exactly what that means. That he really, really is there for us. It is an enabler to want to do better.

MD: We are his child and he loves us. He loves us no matter what.

CC: No matter what, is like

MD: He loves us but we don’t love us. I think that when we do fail.

CC: We don’t measure up. We are harder on ourselves than he probably is.

MD: Instead of going to him immediately, I don’t know whether you would say it is a pity party or a demeaning ourselves or whatever.

BE: I think as a person [inaudible] to a parent. I agree with that, but with a parent, looking down on a child, it would be the same situation. I can't fathom the same circumstance that my child would be in that I would not love him fully.

MD: I agree. I think when you are a parent, you could have a child that is just the worst of the worst, the most sinning person, but you are his parent. You do not like or condone or anything those sins, but you love him under all circumstances, that child. Even that adult, if it is your child.

LM: I'm digging deeper. Discuss the importance of what Paul says in I Corinthians 15:1-11 to the context of what we know about the Christian Church community in I Corinthians 1.

[Passages are read]

BB: My favorite verses are 15:2-4 which says, "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died," Paul didn't die, Apollos didn't die, but essentially what this is saying is that the church must be careful not to follow a person in the church. It is not about that. It is following Christ, and about that. That is the first importance. That we remember it is he who died. He is the one who was buried, He was the one who rose. He is the one who lives in heaven with God. He is the one who is the way, the truth and the life. Those two verse say that we need to know, remember. Scripture already said it. That is what is important. The whole thing about the church is saying, you know, be careful not to keep looking at any person, but look at Christ and follow him.

PD: I think in five years we had, today . . . that is what his message is [inaudible].

LM: Anybody else?

PP: Let me go a little bit deeper on this one. What was the Corinthian Church like when you read from I Corinthians? What was it like? What was the church like?

CB: Internal squabbles.

PP: I'm sorry? Internal squabbles?

CB: Yeah! Something fighting over, you know, the way I am learning is the correct way. The way he is doing it is wrong. They were not focused on Christ, obviously. It is like in Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis talks about Christianity being this long hallway. The individual denominations are the doors that spring off of that. How many people get lost in the love of religion and lose their faith in the process.

MB: It reminds me a little bit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He calls it, "cheap grace," where it, you know, grace without doing anything about it. Oh, I'm saved, that's it, I'm done. I don't have to do anything. You know. I'm, we're saved. That means we can say any

thing. We feel like, do whatever we feel like. You know, and we are going to heaven no matter what we do. It is grace without works that Paul talks about.

TC: This is like that because [inaudible].

LM: Okay. Reflect back on the last eight weeks. If you were to write your own value statement what would it include?

BE: Well, a lot of things that I have noticed that the current teach share, show and grow motto does not reflect the core value service. I don't think that service is part of it.

PK: I think those could be internal. But teaching, certainly as we go out to teach to the world, has a value. Teach, share, show, we are sharing, that is a service, too. So I think that they all can be going out. It depends if you choose to do it, I guess, or if we are going to do that.

CB: When John and I wrote that song, we were talking about just the words...what struck our minds were the first three attributes require us to do something for others. It was the last part, the growth, was the internal portion of that message. So the whole idea that we put it together was that we were to go out and make a difference and consider ourselves last, growth. It was meant more as an internal growth than an external growth of the church.

BB: Well, the growth is like, just as the scripture we read for today, you know, Apollos and Paul and all those were waterers. That's what our first three attributes are. We are going out and watering. Planting the seed and watering, but God is the one who brings the growth. The Holy Spirit that makes it happen. But we have to do the first three before the last one is going to happen.

LM: So if you were to write your own value statement, what would it include?

PK: Pastor, what are the core values of the conference?

PP: That is interesting!

PK: They are more inclusive. They certainly are broader and more inclusive.

PP: Yes, they are. I know it has to do with sharing the gospel, scriptural holiness . . . it raises an interesting point about core values: if they are not memorable and quotable . . .

CB: Yes! How deep are they?

PP: Then you begin to wonder, because it encompasses a whole page of words. And for me to be able to tell you what the core values of the conference are, it's difficult.

BB: Well, this is a very difficult question, because we need to stop and think about it, to really give you a clear creed on what we believe.

PP: I want something that is more of what the first thing that comes to your mind. I don't want a well thought out statement. That is the process that is going to be coming. But what are those things, as we have thought back over the eight weeks—we have shared stories, the early church, the early leaders of the Old Testament—what are these things that we are prompted to say as a church today in regard to core values?

CB: To me it comes down to [inaudible].

CB: It got to be [inaudible] a good plan in my life. Some is so very clear and others, it is just so ambiguous that it allows for so much interpretation [inaudible].

ME: What would Jesus do? That would be a specific core value. Teaching. The resurrection, too.

MB: And I think along with that core value that we have established a core value having an open community?

PP: An open community?

MB: That center around those core values. You can't turn people away. I think you make sure it is an open community. If it is, it is a growing community.

BE: Do you think [inaudible].

MB: I think people get turned away, not necessarily here, but not necessarily at this church. This church is very open. But at other churches where it is an exclusive relationship.

PP: Could you describe for me a little bit more of what an open community means to you?

MB: First of all a community means that—my brother in law and I had a discussion sort of about this last night—the church as become, we have been here twenty-five years in this extended family. Now a family is not always “let's get together around the Thanksgiving table” and all celebrate Thanksgiving. There is always a lot of good and bad going on in family relationships. Yet, the family is who we go back to and that is a very strong part of why we are still here because the family is [inaudible] so the community becomes family. It is a larger context concept. By open I mean, I think, that if you can, if you are not growing, you are dying. That is how I look at life. If you are not learning something or bringing someone new in, eventually you become a closed community. A closed community you see all over this town. My mom goes to a closed community church and they are all in their 75's and 80's and [inaudible]. That's why it is so important to we be open. We have, I mean, we are a fairly diverse church.

CC: Not at all!

PK: No we're not!

MB: You don't think so? I think we are tremendously diverse as far as attitudes and abilities.

BB: Oh?

BE: Yeah! You think of the special needs people we have in the church. That is diverse! I mean you can't everyone have their own way in diversity, but I think that Mark's right. I think there are a lot of diverse ideas.

PP: What does diversity mean to you, that makes you respond that we are not that way?

CC: Diversity for me was cultural.

PK: I think so too. And we may have, as Mark said, a group of people that have different ways of thinking at Evangel Heights. I don't know if that, we are pretty much a white congregation that's not very poor and we are maybe not too rich, but we are all kind of in that same cultural thing. We are not diverse at all. I think we are far from diverse.

ME: I think another thing about open community is honesty—to be open and honest with each other. To be able to say, you know, I do this and will you help me through this [inaudible]. Instead of putting on airs and trying to be something or somebody that you are not or trying to live, it's good to be able to be open with your neighbor. Let them know who you really are and how you really think and how you really feel. And then I think the Holy Spirit can work.

PP: I am going to push openness and diversity to what some of you may find extreme. How about someone who is openly gay?

PK: Would not be accepted here.

PP: Would not be accepted here?

PK: I don't think so.

MB: By whom?

MD: I don't think so.

CB: Maybe by some, but . . .

PK: Maybe by some, but I don't think the majority.

CC: We accept them, but not the sin.

ME: [Inaudible]

?: Didn't hear you Mat.

ME: I just came across a gay, atheist church music director that is someone who is in the hierarchy of some church.

?: That's frightening.

ME: Well, you got, I mean, do you want—how open? What I mean from that point of view is how open are you willing to respond? Are you going to squabble or are you going to be open and honest and communicate. How does that match up with core values? So you are sitting here in this situation and there is somebody who comes along and they are a gay, atheist music director. And you say, "Okay, how does this match up to our core values." And then, you know, so this is one of those diversity type of issues that a core values should hold together.

BB: Well, and are you considered tolerant if you let them know that certain things biblically are not right. How do you do that and still be loving and still have them feel that they are welcome?

BE: Here is my soap box on the issue: we don't do it. We don't do it for other. I don't know what goes on behind your closed doors and I don't hold you accountable for your actions. So why would we hold other people accountable for their actions.

PK: Well, you should!

BE: You should, but we don't. But what makes that different from any other sin?

TC: This week as I was driving, I was thinking about when I was sitting here last week talking about how the church is in some kind of business—the business of Christ. I had this idea that came to me that the church is in this business, of changing lives. Then we would probably welcome that gay person, because we are in the business of changing lives.

PP: See how the core values are so critical. How we respond—if our core values is openness, or if our core value is to change lives. Look at the difference of how we relate to people, how we minister.

TC: If it is changing lives, then everyone is welcome.

CB: Sometimes you have to take.

TC: We can't compromise, then, because we are in the business of changing lives and introducing people to Jesus Christ and having Christ [inaudible] so that they have a deeper relationship with Him. In the process [inaudible] if there is some struggle [inaudible]. But we all try to change our lives. We are all sinners all trying to change our lives.

BB: My best friend always says that we are to love them to heaven. And so, really, if anyone is here, we should be loving them and through that love the change happens.

PP: Can I interrupt. I stirred the pot and I have to leave to get ready for the next service. But we have spent eight weeks together and I am eternally grateful for your responses. I will not be around next week. But this has been a very special journey for the last eight weeks. When I return from California, I will do a better job of thanking you.

BE: Good luck.

PP: Your work is so important and you will see the fruit of that as we go through the next few months.

LM: Okay, back to this thing there because we are about out of time. Does anybody else want to discuss, if you were to write your own creed, what would you include?

BE: I would have, my two key words would be love one another, love God.

BB: Loving God, loving each other.

CB: Love as God has loved us.

LM: Okay.

CB: And that means we don't qualify sin. We don't quantify it, we don't categorize it. So we only work with those [inaudible]. Sin is sin in God's eyes. Whether it is stealing a balloon when you are six years old at the store or a mass murderer. Sin is sin in God's eyes.

LM: You put a person on a pedestal, thinking that they don't, in all reality, they do just like anybody else.

CB: Exactly.

TC: I had to write a paper on [inaudible].

CB: [Inaudible] because of the lack of love in their lives.

TC: Yes. Especially when you consider in God's eyes [inaudible].

CB: Dare I say being homophobic is not a bad thing. It's how we are meant to be. But in the same token it doesn't mean disregarding those that have that lifestyle.

LM: What do you mean, "It is what we are meant to be?"

CB: Well, not in the social attitude that is commentated to that word. We are meant as heterosexual beings according to biblical teaching. Fine, I'm good with that. Those that aren't, uh, if there are issues that is one thing. That doesn't lessen my love for them through Christ than it does for anybody else.

BB: They are still in the image of God, every one of them. And we forget that sometimes.

CB: Absolutely.

LM: Wait a minute. You say we are meant to be that way?

CB: We are created as male-female to procreate the species. God ordained that himself.

?: Well

CB: Because we have choice.

BB: There is sin in the world.

CB: There is sin in the world. Whether there is sin of somebody else or sin of ourselves, we can't [inaudible] situation.

MD: When you said a little while ago that we have to "love them into heaven", I would go further than that. I think we have to love each other into heaven. It is not just somebody we think is a sinner because we all sin, and I think it is very important that we love each other.

CB: It is just not our place to judge. It is our place to love.

MD: And that is why your statement, I agree with your statement so much, that the church, I don't even know what you said, the church is too strong on homosexuals, on judging homosexuals. Is that what you said? I agree with that. I mean who are we setting ourselves up?

CB: Exactly.

TC: I just

BB: It is one sin that is very visible. The problem is that it is one sin that is very visible.

LM: They all are.

BB: But some can be hidden.

CB: A couple of years ago there was not a survey, but a petition going around the conference about the gays within the Methodist Church and they should be condemned. I asked the people who were promoting this, "What about drinking? What about infidelity? What about . . . I can't remember the others." "Oh, those aren't as important a sin as this." That just really honked me off!

TC: We live in such a secular world.

BB: The radical ones.

TC: The radical ones, like the person [inaudible].

CB: [Inaudible] political agenda.

LM: But you think back to black people. There are people in the 60's that would have been sitting here and would have been tolerant of Rosa Parks, but somebody named [inaudible] and they pushed and they pushed it. And by pushing it, people got mad about it too. Whereas that particular issue, that some people were for or against some people got real nervous when people were pushing the issue. Okay, and now we sit here in 2006 and it is like, I don't know about the world, but there are certain people who are focused on *this* now. You know what I mean.

BE: I understand what you're saying and I agree with you with the exception of the fact that, with regards to civil rights, there is nothing, there is no sin about being another color.

LM: I agree.

BE: So I mean

LM: But some people back then did this.

BB: But what is a moral sin and what is not?

LM: I am just saying back then the mentality of the people.

TC: All sin is moral sin.

BB: Well sin against a person. Yeah.

CB: People get political and social issues confused with faith issues. What one word may mean in the faith may not equate.

PK: However, the United Methodist Church does have Social Principles. Which in 2008 are going to [inaudible] a social creed and social principle. So if you want to know more about social principles [inaudible].

BE: [Inaudible]

BB: Somebody said that the most segregated places in the country are churches, if you look at it.

BE: But I think [inaudible].

BB: But I have seen it on the other way around. I have gone into black churches and the looks on their faces, they are looking at me as "what are you doing here or what are you up to. Why are you here?" It is very blatant. I mean some who were there, you know, they accept me 100%, but it was, you know, it is still there, that prejudice. And that mistrust. It is still there today. You may not think so, even in the church."

MD: [Inaudible]

[tape ends]

APPENDIX F
SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Ratings Report

Combined Ratings 4 and 5

46 Respondents

44	95.7 %	Bible-centered preaching/teaching
44	95.7 %	Welcoming visitors
43	93.5 %	Godly servant leadership
43	93.5 %	Christian education (all ages)
42	91.3 %	All people matter to God
42	91.3 %	Local missions
41	89.1 %	Financial responsibility
41	89.1 %	Fellowship community
41	89.1 %	Evangelism
41	89.1 %	Strong families
39	84.8 %	Commitment to discipleship/training
39	84.8 %	Spiritual gifts utilized
37	80.4 %	Intercessory prayer
36	78.3 %	Youth/campus outreach
35	76.1 %	Giving/tithing
34	73.9 %	Sustained excellence/quality
33	71.7 %	A well-mobilized laity
32	69.6 %	Spiritual disciplines
27	58.7 %	The poor and disenfranchised
27	58.7 %	An attractive facility
27	58.7 %	Counseling
25	54.3 %	Creativity and innovation
22	47.8 %	World missions
22	47.8 %	Ethnically/social diverse congregation
20	43.5 %	Cultural relevance
16	34.8%	Prophetic voice for social justice
14	30.4%	Adherence to tradition
13	28.3%	Praise and contemporary worship
11	23.9 %	Use of modern media
0		Status quo

Ranking Report

Respondents Combined Rankings 1, 2, 3

28	60.9% Bible-centered preaching/teaching
26	56.5% Godly servant leadership
14	30.4% All people matter to God
14	30.4% Christian Education (<i>all ages</i>)
05	10.9% A well-mobilized laity
05	10.9% Intercessory prayer
05	10.9% Commitment to discipleship/training
04	08.7% Welcoming visitors
04	08.7% Strong families
04	08.7% Spiritual gifts utilized
03	06.5% Financial responsibility
03	06.5% Fellowship/community
03	06.5% Giving/tithing
03	06.5% Youth/campus outreach
01	02.2% The poor and disenfranchised
01	02.2% World Missions
01	02.2% Sustained excellence/quality
01	02.2% Evangelism
01	02.2% Adherence to tradition
01	02.2% Prophetic voice for social justice
01	02.2% Local missions
00	Creativity and innovation
00	An attractive facility
00	The status quo
00	Cultural relevance
00	Praise and contemporary worship
00	Use of modern media
00	Counseling
00	Spiritual disciplines (<i>i.e. prayer/fasting</i>)

Questionnaire Responses

1. Where do you invest your time at Evangel Heights?

22	Sunday School / Education / Teaching
17	Worship
8	Bible Study / Disciple
8	Music ministry
7	Committees
6	Service / Caring
5	Special services / projects
5	Youth Activities
4	Choir
4	Teachers
3	Stephen ministry
2	Fellowship
2	Children's ministries
	Men's breakfast
	People
	Hope Rescue Mission
	Christmas
	Missions
	Wherever asked
	Prayer group (<i>Tuesday</i>)
	Facility care
	Contacting people
	Finance
	Attempting to use my spiritual gifts
	Trustees
	United Methodist Women
	Do not—a visitor
	I don't know
	No response

Why?

5	I feel that's where God wants me / fits my spiritual gifts
4	It is a joy to serve God and man / exciting
4	My gift to return to the Lord
3	Choir because I enjoy singing
2	Led by God for spiritual fellowship and learning
2	Music adds a lot to the worship experience
	Youth group because of the positive influence my youth group had on me in high school

God loved us, we must love each other—I care—I like people
 Transforming churches and people into communities with the heart
 and mind of Jesus Christ
 To serve
 Socializing with adult groups that we have always known since
 childhood
 This is my church
 Need to be active
 An important time to nurture our next generation of leaders
 Being good stewards of what God has provided
 Seems logical
 To strengthen the Body of Christ
 Health issues prevent me from doing more
 I want to be connected with the youth
 I have a lot to learn about the Bible myself

2. Where do you spend time for God outside of Evangel Heights?

14 Prayer
 8 Devotional time with my family
 8 Trying to show the love of God wherever I go
 6 Emmaus Community / Emmaus Walk
 5 Work environment
 4 Networking with other churches / Bible study
 3 Small groups
 3 With family anywhere
 3 All mission work done in conjunction with EHUMC
 2 Meditation
 2 Reading
 2 Reading the Word
 2 At home
 2 Sidewalk Sunday School
 2 Bridges—a worship service for children with disabilities
 2 Devotional time at work with my peers
 2 Various community outreach events
 Salvation Army
 Safe Home
 Hope Rescue Mission
 Girl Scouts
 Neighborhood
 Cub Scout Leader
 Local and world missions
 Life station at another church
 Volunteering at a nursing home
 Serving others
 Conference committee

Fellowship with other believers
 Some visitations
 Telephone calls for Barnabas
 Children's school
 At work
 Teaching at Bethel / other colleges
 Working with young people
 Greet all people
 Study
 Public service employment
 Stephen Ministry
 Send cards
 Try to be a helping hand wherever needed
 Audubon Society
 Camp Fire Girls
 St. Joseph County Extension—homemaker
 Women's services organization
 Board of Michiana Youth Ministries

3. What are people within and outside Evangel Heights saying about it?

Inside?

10 Friendly / we are a friendly church
 7 There's a lot of excitement in our church these days
 7 Rebounding from a slump / doing better than it was
 4 We are a family / family oriented church
 3 Noticed a few people have returned
 2 Good / nice people
 2 Welcoming
 2 Caring
 2 Lots of things are happening here / changing
 Spiritual community
 Inviting once in the door
 It is exciting to go to worship and Value Added Meals
 It's a great church
 Like the church
 Folks are coming closer
 A good church
 Music is bad - choice of music bad - music department very
 cliquish (*more in past*)
 Services are boring
 No life
 Don't feel the spirit
 Glad Pastor Pat is here / impressed by Pastor Pat
 Always been a church that reached out to the community through

Its mission and educational programs
 Opportunities for service
 Some don't like the new elements we've added like dance, song
 book, upbeat music
 Feels like home
 Electricity in the services
 Beautiful sanctuary
 Mission oriented
 Energetic leadership
 Improved financial situation
 Renewed spirit
 Positive activities
 Would like to see a more contemporary style of worship
 Many inquire about the loss of membership over the past several
 years and if this negatively impacts programs
 At one time an active and dynamic church in the Northern Indiana
 Conference and a bright star within the conference
 A lot of tension
 Strong in Christian Education
 Supportive of young families (*Weekday School & Parents Day
 Out*)
 4 I don't know

Outside?

3 An attractive church
 Not readily recognized in the community
 Haven't heard much (*been at another church*)
 No the location
 Like our Bazaar and such activities
 10 I don't know

4. What is it about Evangel heights that excites you?

8 Preaching
 6 Music and worship is great
 6 Small group studies / Bible studies
 5 Fellowship
 5 Family feeling / continuity of traditional family values
 4 Warm and caring spirit
 3 Led by the Spirit
 3 Worship / traditional
 3 New outlook for the future / enthusiasm
 3 Sunday School classes
 2 The holiness & reverent beauty of the Sanctuary
 2 New leadership

- 2 Committed staff and congregation
 Spiritual maturity
 Have enjoyed the teaching I have received
 The possibilities
 Strong adult group cohesion
 Good friends with a lot of people
 I feel like my concerns will be prayed for and help is there
 Long term friendships
 Commitment to Christ
 People coming back to church
 Bonding of people by the Holy Spirit
 I love it when folks get on board for a new idea/program & make it
 happen—enthusiasm
 People have a lot to share
 Our bible centered worship services
 Classes
 When using my gifts to further God's Kingdom
 The people
 Friendliness of the members
 Seeing attendance rise
 Mortgage burning on fellowship hall
 Members from all walks of life
 We pray for each other
 Many people are searching for God's meaning to their life
 Special services like "The Longest Night"
 Family atmosphere
 The pastor is approachable
 Increase of children / young families / avenue for future growth
 The people
 Evangelism
 All that's going on
 Growing spirit of cooperation
 Care and concern for others
 Ability to improve the facilities
 Growing congregation
 New services such as "Healing Services"
 Watching our young members grow and mature
 I love it when nearly all people are participating & you can feel the
 enjoyment
 That people won't give up . . . are constantly working to make it
 better
 Open
 Welcoming
- 3 No response

5. When people brag about Evangel Heights, about what specifically do they brag?

- 14 A friendly church
- 11 Caring spirit / people care / caring community of believers
- 5 Sunday School / Education
- 4 Pastor Pat / new and exciting leadership
- 3 The people / members
- 3 Parent's Day Out
- 3 Weekday School
- 3 New opportunities to serve and get involved
- 2 Commitment to children, youth and families
- Participation
- People are usually welcomed on their first visit
- Diversity of programs
- Bible preaching
- Great fellowship
- Open people
- We are a Bible centered church
- Music (*especially the organ*)
- The way the pastor teaches
- Study of God's word
- Strong long term friendships
- Open congregation
- Beauty of sanctuary
- Local Missions / Hope Rescue Mission
- Willingness of members to participate in activities outside the church
- The nicest, most complimentary thing is to be a church that you
Invite your friends and family to. I do invite people to
come.
- Generous congregation
- Greater mission concerns
- 4 I don't know
- 3 I don't hear people bragging
- 7 No response

6. What do you admire most about Evangel Heights?

- 9 Caring
- 8 The love of the people of God for each other
- 5 A family feeling
- 4 Friends
- 3 A warm spirit
- 3 All age groups are involved with each other / a 3-4 generation congregation
- 3 Spiritual motivation / depth

- 2 People
- 2 Preaching the Gospel
- 2 Strong prayer life
- 2 Creative programming
- 2 Steadfastness
- Enjoy the worship services
- Welcome everyone regardless of race, economic standing, etc., and try to get them involved
- Faithfulness of people—a core group
- Loving, Godly leadership
- Openness
- In the name of Jesus we hold & lift each other up
- Good families
- We have lots of enthusiastic people who will start things
- Diversity of gifts that are used to enhance our worship
- Commitment to the body of Christ
- Giving of the members
- A sense of community
- Strongly committed people
- Friendly
- Sanctuary
- The smallness / more appealing than a giant church
- Obvious common ground we share: evangelism
- Sincerity of people
- Missions—local & overseas
- Teaching
- Open to God's leading
- I don't know
- 4 No response

Least?

- 4 Don't like the bickering over the "nothing items"
- 2 Not usually willing to step out in faith
- Absence of quiet time prior to worship
- Transient nature of congregation when pastors change
- Too many are more attached to the pastor than to Jesus
- Too many people not personally involved in sharing their gifts
- Not accepting change
- Lack of overall outreach to community & world
- Poor youth attendance
- Too much happening—spread too thin
- The music—very depressing
- Meetings for meetings sake
- Depending on who you are if you're listened to
- Tradition and the complete organization

I wish we had more contemporary music
(spent too much money on that new organ)
 Fragmentation of resources for “pet” projects
 Needs lots of work / AC in fellowship hall
 Unwillingness to support efforts financially
 Ritual in services
 Inadequate space for fellowship between services
 It seems the same “core” people are involved in all activities
 Need a focus on evangelism
 I wish the conflict in the choir could have been solved without
 losing a family
 Foot dragging when change is needed
 Building needs sprucing up
 No basic beliefs class (*Christianity 101*) etc.
 The continued discord within the choir
 I think there is still some “cliquishness”
 People who refuse to yield when the greater good will be served
 12 No response

7. Name one or two changes that would make this church better

- 4 More participants in worship—members & others
- 4 Build participation and cohesion around local commitments
- 3 Completion of building phases / better handling of crowds / full functioning church
- 2 Contemporary music / revamp using guitars, drums, etc.
- 2 Focus on one or two ministries and do them well / we’re spread too thin / we must have 30-40 and none make much difference
- 2 Keep trying new ideas / innovations / be more in touch with technology
- Bring a focus to missions
- A clear vision and goals for the future
- Change 11am service to a contemporary service
- Don’t forget families who are not “involved” outside of Sunday morning—encourage them to prayer meetings, Sunday School, etc.
- Salaried or volunteer building manager—“fix-it person”
- Long term pastorates
- More money to do programs
- Reaching out beyond our four walls including evangelism and service
- Becoming a diverse body of Christ
- More uplifting music
- A/C in fellowship hall
- Adding modern tech
- Put collection plate in rear of church for “giving” after the service stop taking up offering at every setting

Change music program with more variety
 More emphasis on youth program
 A prayer box
 More people active in church and administration
 Turn down the volume of the organ during congregational singing
 A contemporary service would be good but not well attended
 Proactive not reactive to our financial situation
 More opportunities for two services to fellowship together such as
 dinners / pot-lucks
 Short term evening groups (*not like the long term commitment to
 the Disciple class*)
 Revitalize the Women's Circles in the evenings and on Saturday
 A United Methodist Men's Group
 Adding a continuing basic beliefs class
 More leaders (*not meaning the pastor*) need to be trained in the
 scriptures
 Establish mentoring or ongoing training programs
 Have a class for post high school and college students / recruit
 Participants

 Congregation putting God first in our lives / principles such as
 tithing / reaching out beyond our comfort zone
 More people involved in the choir
 Utilize all parts of the church
 Both services full of people
 Deeper commitment to cause of Christ & personal spiritual growth
 Too many paid staff / use money in more Godly ways
 More worship opportunities in the evening
 Everyone tithe
 Financial soundness that would enable us to be more mission
 minded
 That each member would truly know what Deuteronomy 6:4-9
 means
 That each member would truly know what it means to be a
 member of Christ's body
 More ongoing Disciple classes
 A more involved Emmaus group
 Finding a kind, appropriate way to handle disruptive children
 during worship

What would you not change?

- 5 Pastor
- 5 The way we care for each other
- 3 8:45a.m. blended worship service oriented to families
- 2 Music programs

- 2 Our support for local and foreign missions
- Our love for Jesus Christ
- Communion
- Baptism
- Classes
- Signing Choir
- Timothy
- Do not try to be “too” contemporary and attract everybody
- Focus on prayer
- Bible centered preaching
- Stephen ministry
- Church School
- The sermon discussion class
- The warm feeling when we enter the church
- The Sanctuary
- Ongoing groups that have been a success
- Don’t change emphasis on youth programming
- 16 No response

8. If God would make possible one thing for Evangel Heights, what would it be?

- 5 Revival
- 4 The light the fire of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of the congregation so that His work would be first & foremost in each person’s life
- 3 A passion to spread the Good News
- 3 To reach hurting folks that need God’s love & a sense of caring family
- 2 A mission
- 2 A population explosion
- 2 More active spiritual leadership within the community
- 2 Keep good pastors
- To provide the leadership with the discernment to make wise decisions
- A focus
- Unity of purpose through prayer / entire congregation
- Everyone would be on the same page
- I leave
- To have spiritually uplifting music / right now it’s slow and depressing
- Everyone in the congregation would participate in at least one church activity
- Grow to a large enough dedicated congregation that the vitality and viability of the church was certain to continue
- Our people would get up Sunday mornings and can’t wait to get to

church
 Fewer money issues
 Make us a soul winning church
 Wisdom for efficient use of our resources in our service to the
 Lord
 Financial soundness that would enable us to have a mission
 outreach
 Need more people in the 20-40 age group
 Everyone would tithe
 More organized, consistent opportunities for outreach
 Repentance and forgiveness between members
 A full second service
 God's will to be done for Evangel Heights church
 To invite everyone in South Bend to know Christ
 Increase volunteer base to adequately equip all the ministry dreams
 To grow without losing our small congregation feeling
 That we would truly be what God envisions for this portion of the
 Body of Christ
 A totally comprehensive Christian educational program for all ages
 Enlarging the hall linking narthex to classrooms
 Keep pastors over many years
 Unlimited resources of all types
 A dynamic, organized, experienced youth director who would
 continue to grow the youth programs and encourage more
 adult involvement

7 No response

9. What is most important to you about Evangel Heights?

9 The friends and support in my Christian life & growth
 6 Caring fellowship
 5 Keep on caring, praying as God's group of seeking people
 4 Bible preaching
 4 People
 4 A sense of community
 3 Family of God / family oriented
 3 Learning / multiple opportunities for study
 2 The fellowship of believers
 2 It's my place to grow and learn more about God & man
 Spirit led
 The quality of teaching
 The friendly people who are members
 The people of Evangel Heights are my family.
 In God's family I feel loved unconditionally
 It's home—it's part of my family
 Sanctuary
 Friendliness

The wonderful leadership of the church
 Love
 Our Sunday School class—that is why we didn't leave when things
 were going in the wrong direction
 Coming to worship and to praise God
 That we continue to grow and receive new members who challenge
 us in our missions, education, and worship
 That we maintain our values in the Wesley tradition
 Good music
 That it not die as so many churches have
 Secure / bring in more young couples / families
 I feel accepted
 Worship
 Sunday School
 Dynamic pastor
 That we receive the same message as the church in Rev. 3:7-13
 A sense that we're all n the same spiritual journey
 Christian education regarding family issues
 Having the Christian experience be fun & uplifting
 Bringing people to Christ
 Use of formality / ritual / Apostle's Creed used more often
 Finding an outlet for my gifts
 Acceptance even when disagreements come up

10. What do you understand to be Evangel Heights' core value?

26 Teach, Share, Show, Grow
 3 Education
 2 Tradition
 2 Spiritual commitment
 2 Fellowship
 2 Promote the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior of the world
 2 Be careful these don't become words or leave out Christ
 Faith
 Love
 Worship
 Ministry
 Teaching (*but we must be careful what we are teaching*)
 To bring people out of darkness
 Learning and keeping the will of God
 Preaching the gospel
 Filling spiritual & physical needs
 Integrity
 Moral values
 A mature people trying to do God's work
 Godly nurturing & growth in our faith

Dedication to helping others
 Warmth within the body
 Belief in God's power to work in the world
 Missions . . . I think the values have been side tracked over the
 years with the many pastoral changes.
 Evangelism
 Bible based
 Inclusive
 Open doors
 That the love of Christ be expressed within & without the church
 through all activities
 I don't know
 4 No response

Have you participated in any other form of research associated with this project?

10 Yes
 37 No

If so, please describe your involvement.

3 "contextual associate"
 7 Sunday School class discussion / critique

APPENDIX G
CODING SYSTEMS

Open codes consist of those basic, initial concepts by which transcripts were categorized. This is the final coding system

OPEN CODING SYSTEM	
Systemic Concepts	
God	Evangelism
Jesus	Personal sharing
Holy Spirit	Hospitality
Missions	Prayer
Social action	Grace
Leadership	Teaching
Lay	Scripture
Pastoral	Disciple-making
Worship	Preaching
Stewardship	
Community	

Each open code is defined by extrinsic properties, or characteristics, to allow for a more thorough examination of transcripts. Extrinsic properties also help to assess areas of strength or weakness.

GOD (TRINITY)	
Extrinsic Properties	
Holy	Creator
Sustainer	Comforter
Love	Jesus
Savior	Lord
Holy Spirit	Leader
Teacher	Eternal
Healer	Guide
Grace	Forgiveness
Righteous	

MISSIONS
Extrinsic Properties

World outreach	Local service
Physical needs meeting	Spiritual/evangelistic needs meeting
Individual service	Group work (work camps and teams)
Monetary support for sent missionaries	Support of indigenous missionaries
Social action	

LEADERSHIP
Extrinsic Properties

Lay leadership	Pastoral leadership
Vision	Power
Staff	Recruitment
Moral	Biblical
Pastoral change	Enthusiasm
Motivation	Challenge

WORSHIP
Extrinsic Properties

Contemporary	Traditional
Emergent	Sacraments
Preaching	God's Word
Liturgy	Music
Dance	Response
Giving	Receiving

STEWARDSHIP
Extrinsic Properties

Use of spiritual gifts	Identification of passion
Understanding of personality	The resource of time
The resource of talent	The resource of wealth
Environmental resources	Cultural resources
Response to God's grace	Responsibility

COMMUNITY
Extrinsic Properties

Proleptic	Prophetic
Sacramental	Transformative
Fellowship of the Spirit	Body of Christ
Gathering of the faithful	Servant
Place of free will and grace	Place of acceptance and love
Godly vision and mission	Dealing with change
Deals with world and personal conflict	Place to encounter Christ and truth
Communication	Biblically-based

EVANGELISM
Extrinsic Properties

Personal testimony (worship)	Personal testimony (private)
Friendship	Hospitality
Trust	Serendipitous moments
Intentional	Outreach into community
Respect	Relational
Service-oriented	

PRAYER
Extrinsic Properties

Formal worship prayers	Extemporaneous
Intercessory	Personal meditation
Praise and thanksgiving	Confession
Prayer for decision making and clarity	

GRACE
Extrinsic Properties

Pardon	Healing for soul
Healing for body	God's loving presence
Personal transformation	Societal transformation
Ecological transformation	Openness
Hospitality	Unconditional love
Unearned, unrepayable	Prevenient
Sanctifying	Redeeming

TEACHING
Extrinsic Properties

Biblically-centered	Classroom
Small group	Bible study
Disciple class	Mentoring
Discussion group	Expository preaching
Leadership development	Disciple-making
Application to world events	Application to personal life

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